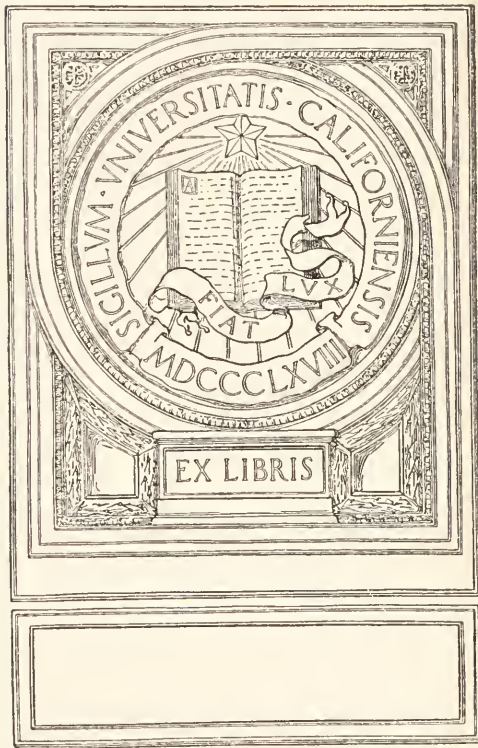


*HENRI BERGSON: A STUDY  
IN RADICAL EVOLUTION*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
AT LOS ANGELES







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**HENRI BERGSON**

**A STUDY  
IN RADICAL EVOLUTION**

*BOOKS BY EMIL CARL WILM*



THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCHILLER,  
BOSTON, 1912.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION,  
BOSTON, 1912.

THE CULTURE OF RELIGION,  
BOSTON, 1912.

TRANSLATION OF KLEMM, GE-  
SCHICHTE DER PSYCHOLOGIE,  
NEW YORK, 1914.

HENRI BERGSON: A STUDY IN  
RADICAL EVOLUTION, NEW  
YORK, 1914.

# HENRI BERGSON

## *A Study in Radical Evolution*

By

EMIL CARL WILM, Ph.D., LL.D.

Professor of Philosophy in Wells College. Lecturer in  
Philosophy at Bryn Mawr College  
for 1914-15

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P  
2430  
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TO  
MRS. MAX PIUTTI  
DEAN OF WELLS COLLEGE  
IN HONOR AND RESPECT

242265

Die blosse Reflexion also ist eine Geisteskrankheit des Menschen . . . welche sein höheres Daseyn im Keim, sein geistiges Leben, welches nur aus der Identität hervorgeht, in der Wurzel tötet. Sie ist ein Übel das den Menschen selbst ins Leben begleitet und auch für die gemeineren Gegenstände der Betrachtung alle Anschauung in ihm zerstört.

Schelling — *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur.*

## PREFACE

THIS little book is intended to be a brief and comparatively non-technical statement of Bergson's philosophy which shall be intelligible to the general reader who wishes to know something of this much talked-of philosopher. Although fully recognising that such a book would meet a widely felt and entirely legitimate demand, I have not undertaken it without some misgivings. It is always difficult to do justice to a writer when one has to lift his leading ideas out of the context in which they properly belong. And I have no illusions of having succeeded completely in doing so.

Bergson is particularly difficult to deal with in a summary sketch of this kind on account of the profusion of his thought and the extreme complexity of many of his ideas. For, in spite of the great interest of his teachings and the charm of his manner, Bergson is after all a technical writer, one who can hardly be treated adequately without bringing into requisition considerable scholarly apparatus. With the subtler complications of his thought, and merely technical re-

finements, I have accordingly thought it wise not to deal at all.

There is nothing more puzzling, in fact, to one interested in such things, than the unexampled enthusiasm over Bergson among the reading laity as well as among scientists and professional students of philosophy. Bergsonitis, which seems to be spreading around the world, is in most cases undoubtedly to be diagnosed as a purely subjective malady, due either to a process of auto-suggestion, or, what is more likely, to the persistent suggestive influence of a misguided public press. Any individual case of this disorder can usually be relieved by a dose of Bergson himself, as almost any sufferer can prove to his complete satisfaction. The case of the public press is of course of a different nature, and will require a different treatment. An international alliance might in any case be formed for the suppression of eulogistic pieces which are not accompanied by at least some explanation of what Bergson really teaches.

I have myself not wished to add to the flood of merely laudatory literature on Bergson, nor have I wished, on the other hand, to hasten the disillusionment regarding him by writing in such a manner that the reader would not go further. I have tried, rather, to afford a clue to Bergson's writings themselves, to which, I hope, the reader may be induced to go in order to supple-

ment, and often to correct, the impressions he may have gotten from my fragmentary pages. I have, indeed, let Bergson speak for himself wherever possible; but the isolated passages quoted should by no means take the place, with the more serious student, of a more continuous reading of the sources.

Bergson's principal books are three in number, all of them translated into English. They are, to mention them in their chronological order, *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896), and *Creative Evolution* (1907). Besides these works Bergson has written a small book, *Laughter*, containing a theory of the comic, and a long list of articles. Perhaps the most important of these for his system is the one entitled *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, published in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* for January, 1903. An English translation of this work has also recently been issued.

The material of the present book (up to Section XIV), was originally given as two public lectures in Harvard University, and I have since presented the main part of it before a group of philosophy students in Wellesley College and, subsequently, at an open meeting of the Philosophy Club of Cornell University. The circumstance of its oral composition and delivery will partly account for an occasional informality and directness of statement which

I have not been careful to remove in preparing the book for the press, as I could not assume that more than a small proportion of my readers would be specialists in philosophy, and as I believed that the non-philosophical reader would generally prefer the informal to the more circumstantial and more carefully modified presentation suited to the study and to pure scholarship. I have also moderated the rigour of a number of passages which I was sure, on second consideration, could not possibly be of much interest to any but comparatively hardened philosophers.

I have to thank Professor Lovejoy, of Johns Hopkins University, for kindly reading the text in manuscript and for offering a number of important criticisms and suggestions. I only regret that the work of printing had progressed so far when his comments reached me that I could not incorporate them as fully as I should have liked. I have, however, included in the subjoined bibliography a list of Mr. Lovejoy's own publications on Bergson in which the reader will find a full exposition of a number of points of first-rate historical and theoretical interest, such as the relation of leading Bergsonian doctrines to the Romantic philosophy of 1790-1805 (which I have myself commemorated by the passage from Schelling prefixed to this book), and to certain French

neo-criticists, and where he will also find a striking criticism of Bergson's doctrine of time.

My wife has read both the manuscript and the proof of the book, and made a number of very useful suggestions. M. Bergson has done me the honour of a similar service, which I hereby appreciatively acknowledge. Finally, my kinsman and friend, Professor Felix Krueger, of the University of Halle, read the critical portion of my text, and inflicted "faithful wounds" which have done the book (and I trust its author!) much good.

E. C. WILM.

Aurora-on-Cayuga, New York,  
Easter, 1914.





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# I

## THE NEW PHILOSOPHY AND THE RENAISSANCE OF SPIRIT



# I

## THE NEW PHILOSOPHY AND THE RENAISSANCE OF SPIRIT

A GOOD deal has lately been written about an alleged dearth of men of letters at the present time, and the suggestion has more than once been made that the rapid rise of science is largely responsible for a certain matter-of-fact mood and a prosaic habit of mind which are essentially unfriendly to the production of imaginative literature. And when one tries to recall the names of living writers whose genius compares with that of the great literary figures of the last few generations, Goethe and Schiller in Germany, Browning and Tennyson in England, Emerson and Poe in America, one cannot but feel that the observations referred to have some force.

That disillusionment is a genuine trait of the modern mind is undoubtedly true. One or two other considerations, however, must be kept in mind. One is that fame is usually acquired tardily. Temporary obscurity must be the normal lot of a creative mind in the very nature of the case, since the ideas and forms created must,

just because they are original, first make their way in the world before they can reflect honour upon their source. Thus are genius and mediocrity often indistinguishable (a dangerous doctrine to promulgate) until time has told between them. And even time's judgment may to the end remain vague and incompetent. "To be great," said Emerson, "is to be misunderstood."

A second very interesting reason for the apparent dearth of creative talent is that this is due, not to the fact that there is no such talent, but that there is so much. In an earlier day, when the means of publishing were meagre, only a few men engaged in literature, and the public notice which they received was proportionately general. With the increased facilities of printing, however, and the mental stimulus due thereto, a much greater number of men enter literature, with the result that it is becoming increasingly difficult to rise above the great mass of talented writers who are competitors for public favour.

The observations made of fine literature apply equally to other forms of spiritual endeavour, to fine art, invention, science, and philosophy. It is truly interesting and remarkable, therefore, when a man arises who, amid the enormous intellectual competition under which he works, and in his own time and

generation, achieves the much-coveted distinction of greatness. It is the more remarkable when such a man arises in a branch of learning like philosophy, which is at present suffering wide-spread indifference, or even positive disaffection. Paulsen has somewhere divided all knowledge into two fundamental kinds, that which is capable of direct application to the practical problems of life, and that which gives an added insight into the nature of the universe in which we live. Granting such a division to be a valid one, philosophy and literature would doubtless fall under the second head. Their value is theoretical and sentimental, rather than utilitarian or practical. But this is evidently not an age fond of pure speculation or of useless forms of sentiment. Knowledge, to repeat a well-worn commonplace, has no value for itself; its only value lies in its practical uses, whatever may be meant by this all-embracing piece of ambiguity. Philosophy, particularly, falls under the general condemnation. Unable to bake bread, and bringing nothing in her hand but the offerings of God, freedom and immortality, she has suffered a temporary eclipse, while the more hopeful members of the scientific fraternity are even ready to predict her eventual and ultimate extinction.

In spite of these obvious difficulties, three philosophers, at least, have lately achieved

world-wide recognition, Eucken in Germany, James in America, and Bergson in France. It would be a most fascinating psychological study to analyse the type of mentality represented by these various writers with a view to finding the secret of their enormous popularity. Is this popularity only another illustration of crowd contagion? In a book like James' *Pragmatism* or Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, have we simply to do with a case similar to that of one of the "ten best sellers" which is read by multitudes, not on account of any intrinsic merit which the book possesses, but only because everybody is reading it?

Doubtless, crowd contagion plays its part in spreading the reputation of a truly significant book as well as that of the latest novel whose cheapness is only surpassed by its hopeless inanity. The true explanation, however, must strike deeper. Philosophical ideas, like other things, survive only in an environment fairly friendly to their existence and support. It will therefore likely be found that all these writers appeal in one way or another to that indefinable but very real and solid thing the Germans call *Zeitgeist*, the intellectual atmosphere and tendencies of the time. The analysis of these writers should, therefore, turn out to be also an index of the intellectual temper and outlook of their generation. They are truly representative



men, taking up into themselves and voicing the insights and feelings widely distributed throughout society, but too vague and inarticulate to find elsewhere clear expression.

It is interesting to note, in any case, that in an age which has seen the apotheosis of power Eucken's system has been called activism, James' pragmatism, and Bergson's activism and pragmatism in turn. Doubtless, all these systems are phases of what is broadly called voluntarism in modern psychology and philosophy, the view which proclaims will or activity as the bottom property of things, the pivotal reality of the universe.

An examination of the writings of these philosophers will reveal other traits which are common to their generation. Let us notice these briefly.

One is the strong feeling of discontent with the intellectual achievements of the past. They show almost an antipathy to the stereotyped forms in which traditional thought has prevalingly been cast. They all alike attack the riddle of existence in a new way, or else seek to express old truth with a new freshness and sincerity.

Another trait common to these writers is their hearty sympathy with science, although they are ready enough to criticise science when it extends its jurisdiction beyond its legitimate do-

main.<sup>1</sup> James and Bergson, indeed, began their academic careers as students of science, James in physiology and psychology, Bergson in mathematics. The admirable acquaintance of these writers with contemporary scientific literature of both the physical and the life sciences has done much to regain for philosophy the respect of students of science which it has not always enjoyed. Indeed, science has a good deal to learn from a man like James, who was able to take facts as he found them, and to treat them in an impartial spirit, even if they belonged to departments of life which few men can enter without suffering disturbance of judgment. I have in mind, of course, James' classic studies of the phenomena of the religious consciousness, the results of which we have in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a model and a monument for every future scientific investigator.

There is a third characteristic which is common to all these writers, and that is their effort to bring philosophy down from heaven to earth,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Santayana apparently does not entirely approve of this. Bergson studies science conscientiously, he writes (in his *Winds of Doctrine*, p. 64), but "with a certain irritation and haste to be done with it, somewhat as a Jesuit might study Protestant theology." What Mr. Santayana evidently desires is that a philosopher shall study science in such a way that he will not wish to criticise it. But this demand is surely a trifle excessive.

to bring it into a living relation with the problems of our daily existence. "The great masters of English and French philosophy," Bergson has recently been quoted as saying, "have this in common — that philosophy is not a thing of schools only; that it takes its origin in life, and that if it passes through the schools it has to enter again into life." In conformity with this thought that philosophy must connect itself with the problems of real life, all these writers seek to give their thought an intelligible and even an attractive expression. English and French philosophy have another thing in common, according to Bergson: the striving for clearness of expression. "If one reads a passage from Locke," he recently said, "of David Hume, of Berkeley, or of Mill, or a passage of Malebranche, or of Condillac, one arrives at the conclusion that there is no philosophy, however subtle, however profound, which cannot express itself in language which every one can understand."

Bergson's gifts of philosophic exposition are indeed quite extraordinary, surpassed, among recent writers, only by those of James himself. It is not easy to speak with moderation of one loved and lately lost, but was there ever a style like James', combining to an equal degree strength with simplicity, vigour with deftness of touch, copiousness of thought with economy of

expression? It makes one think of a vigorous tree from which every dry limb has been cut away. James' style has not the blinding brilliancy of Nietzsche's: it has become a perfect medium through which thought can pass with no perceptible loss from opacity or refraction. Not the least of the many services of William James to philosophy (especially American philosophy, which has not learned to speak its mother tongue) is the noble heritage of a really competent philosophic style, illustrated in such works as his *Principles of Psychology*, *The Will to Believe*, and *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

There is a fourth characteristic of the new philosophy which seems to be symptomatic of the new humanistic renaissance that has been such an unmistakable characteristic of the last decade or two. This is the new romanticism or idealism which it reflects. The philosophy of the last generation, deeply affected as it was by the results of physical science, tended strongly towards naturalism, which sought to extend conceptions whose employment had yielded such rich results in the study of nature — conceptions like force, mechanical causation, evolution through the survival of the fittest, etc., — to the universe as a whole, including the realms of life and mind. Life and mind were thus dislocated from the strategic place in the universe which they were

once supposed to occupy. Man was a bird on the mountain, consciousness an ephemeral feature in the material universe, destined to disappear as soon as the physical conditions making it possible should no longer be realised. Cosmic purpose, the freedom of the will, immortality and other historical doctrines of much ethical and sentimental interest were so many fictions which had been rendered unworthy by the increase of knowledge.

The resulting mood was one of wide-spread disillusionment. The end of wisdom was to be content with a modest lot, and to face uncomplainingly the eventual extinction awaiting man and the race of men alike. Never has this mood been more eloquently voiced than by Bertrand Russell in his essay, *The Freeman's Worship*: "Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life;

proudly defiant of the irresistible forces which tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power."

Well, in Eucken, James and Bergson, intrepid thinkers though they are, and willing to follow truth wherever it leads, we see a notable revival of anthropomorphic, humanistic ways of thinking, in which man comes to his own again. Idealism, teleology, the creation of novelty in the world, ethical optimism, even immortality, again find a significant place in philosophy, thus affording a fresh illustration of a statement of William James written more than thirty years ago. "Nothing could be more absurd," wrote James, "than to hope for the definitive triumph of any philosophy which should refuse to legitimate, and to legitimate in an emphatic manner, the more powerful of our emotional and practical tendencies. Fatalism, whose solving word in all crises of behaviour is 'all striving is vain,' will never reign supreme, for the impulse to take life strivingly is indestructible in the race."

True, the idealism of our newest time cannot be the same idealism that we knew before science and naturalism had their say. The new idealism is a chastened idealism, with the cruder

features of the older systems pretty thoroughly left out; teleology is not of the old watch-making type; optimism rests upon the possibility of the world's becoming perfect rather than already being so; creation is evolutionary in its method, and immortality may be a hard-won conquest rather than a present gift. The ancient idol, it will be seen, is on its base again, but it wears a new aspect, and its base is wider and laid more deeply than before. It is the old idealism come to life again, like a root which sends new branches forth when the winter relaxes its grasp; it is the old idealism with new features; the old idealism without the old complacency; a critical, enlightened idealism; an idealism conscious of its strength, but conscious, too, of the vastness and the variety of its problems, and of the difficulty of their eventual solution.





## II

### THE APOTHEOSIS OF CHANGE



## II

### THE APOTHEOSIS OF CHANGE

IT is interesting, in view of what has been said, to find a writer like Professor Lovejoy characterising Bergson's philosophy as an evolutionism which is at once radical and romantic. The two features of his thought are in a way suggested by the title of his latest important work, *Creative Evolution*, and we shall have abundant opportunity to notice illustrations of this two-fold aspect of Bergson's thought as we become more fully acquainted with his characteristic ideas.

The thoroughgoing application of the notion of evolution is indeed the most striking aspect of Bergson's system. If one were asked to state in a single sentence the gist of Bergson's teaching, one could do no better than to repeat the celebrated Heraclitean doctrine, Reality is a flux. The only real aspect of things is their constant mutability.

But the idea must be taken heroically, radically. The fundamental doctrine of evolution, namely that the world has not always been what

it is, but that it has arrived at its present stage of development gradually, by the accumulation of a vast number of finite changes, is indeed a commonplace both of science and of popular thought, and always has been. The theory of evolution or development, though often ascribed to Darwin and Herbert Spencer, is really of very ancient origin, and there has never been a time in the history of human thinking, from Anaximander and Aristotle to Hegel and Bergson, when it has not had its representatives and champions.

Evolution theories of the prevalent type, however, are after all only quasi-evolutionary. "Throughout most of the nineteenth century," says Professor Lovejoy, "the century of evolutionary ways of thinking in all the provinces of thought, both the idealistic philosophers and popular theology have taken their evolutionism with reserves — have, indeed, made it always subordinate to its logical opposites in metaphysics, the creationism of Hebrew cosmogony or the emanationism of the later Platonists. Both these fashions of conceiving the temporal aspect of things assumes that a sort of Being that is perfect and infinite and omnipotent must have come first in the order of existence — first logically and chronologically and causally; and, what is more, that such a Being, even though it somehow engenders a world of beings imper-

## THE APOTHEOSIS OF CHANGE 19

fect and finite and destined to struggle and to gradual development, remains itself no less perfect and infinite and unperturbed."

But if we are to adopt the flowing philosophy under the leadership of Bergson we must do so heartily and wholly: we must eliminate the last vestige of the static and the permanent, whether it exists in the form of a first and stable cause of things, a fundamental substance which underlies all change, or even in the form of a plan or purpose which nature through its various mutations is striving to fulfil. The only thing which is permanent in the midst of change is, as Heraclitus long ago said, the law of change itself. Stability anywhere else is mere appearance, the illusion of an imperfect human faculty.<sup>1</sup>

God is therefore not a creative force in the sense of a permanent personal cause who by the action of his will once for all creates things, or continually produces them. God is not a substance, and his creations are not things. "Everything," says Bergson in *Creative Evolu-*

<sup>1</sup> Still, according to other parts of Bergson's system, the vicissitudes which any phase of reality undergoes are not so drastic as to result in its complete (or even partial!) destruction. Our flying experiences always embody within themselves the accumulated history of the entire past. In fact, the contrast between the two ideas of radical becoming and eternal durability is so startling in Bergson's system as fairly to take one's breath away. Cf. further p. 82, n. 1, and pp. 94-5.

tion, "is obscure in the idea of creation if we think of *things* which are created and a *thing* which creates, as we habitually do, as the understanding cannot help doing. . . . But things and states are only views, taken by the mind, of becoming. There are no things, but only actions. . . . God thus defined has nothing of the already made; He is unceasing life, action, freedom. Creation, so conceived, is not a mystery; we experience it in ourselves when we act freely."

We have encountered in this passage one of the most characteristic positions in Bergson's philosophy. The deepest, nay, the only, real aspect of things is change. But the intellect through its concepts represents reality as static. The flux of reality is transmuted into things; change becomes fixity; nature is immobilised and falsified. Reality as it is has nothing in common with reality as science represents it to us. For reality is nothing complete, it is in the making; it is not perfection, but action; not status, but life; not fixity, but freedom.

How comes it, then, that the scientific intellect has always treated reality as a collection of atoms, objects, classes, in short, statically?

This brings us to a very fundamental point in Bergson's theory of knowledge: it is due, he replies, to the limitation of the intellect, which is merely an annex to the faculty of action. The

function of the intellect is to preside over action, but action is possible only when phenomena are treated as integral and stable. Hence it comes to pass, as Bergson says in an oft-quoted passage, "that our human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids, where our action finds its fulcrum and our industry its tools; that our concepts have been formed on the model of solids; that our logic is, pre-eminently, the logic of solids; that our intellect triumphs in geometry."

But an instrument developed merely in the interest of practical action is powerless to deal with reality as it is. The intellectual constructions of science, therefore, have no ultimate validity. Science is not metaphysics.





### III

## PRIMORDIAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS INTELLECTUAL RECONSTRUCTION



### III

#### PRIMORDIAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS INTELLECTUAL RECONSTRUCTION

THE notion of Bergson of the perfectly continuous character of what is real, and his contention that the intellect essentially falsifies reality by casting it into stereotyped, atomic forms, are so characteristic of Bergson's philosophy, and so thoroughly violate our accustomed way of thinking, which trusts the intellect, and sees things substantially, that we shall do well to attempt at this point some preliminary exposition, as simple and impartial as may be, of the fundamental ideas under consideration.

It is unquestionable that the primordial sense consciousness of the young infant or of one of the lower animal forms is a structureless, single-tissue affair, resembling in that respect the jelly-like body of an animal organism at a very low stage of zoological evolution. It is "a big, blooming, buzzing confusion," nowhere showing those cleavages, lines and boundaries which give to our maturer experience so much structure

and relational variety. "Boundaries," says James in his posthumous book, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, "are things that intervene: but here [in the primordial, perceptual flux] nothing intervenes save parts of the perceptual flux itself, and these are overflowed by what they separate, so that whatever we distinguish and isolate conceptually is found perceptually to telescope and compenetrates and diffuse into its neighbours. The cuts we make are purely ideal."

This breaking up of the original continuity is due to the selective power of attention, which isolates this or that aspect or detail, and to memory, which refuses to let the phase once isolated merge again with other parts of the mental field. James describes the process with characteristic skill: "Out of the original sensible muchness attention carves out objects and identifies them forever — in the sky constellations, on the earth beach, sea, cliff, bushes, grass. Out of time we cut days and nights, summers and winters. We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstracted *whats* are concepts. The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes."

It is thus through our intellectual analyses and recombinations that the objects, classes, lines

of spatial, temporal and dynamic relationship, which so endlessly divide our experience, come about, the whole taking on an increasing order and organisation with the progress of intellectual sophistication. What was originally homogeneous thus becomes heterogeneous; what was telescoped and run together becomes differentiated and cut off. What was current and continuous, Bergson would add, becomes immobile and stereotyped! For relation means fixation. The intellectual identification of parts or phases of the flux for purposes of future reference or practical control means their arrest and permanent solidification.

We thus see the fundamental imperfection of all human knowledge, its inadequacy as an instrument to convey to us the truth about that which is real. The phases of reality are evanescent; our ideas or concepts referring to them are motionless and eternal. Reality is fluent; our meanings are fixed and standardised. Reality as it is is wild and on the wing; reality as it exists for the intellect is dead, mounted and scientifically classified. "The intellect," says Bertrand Russell, "may be compared to a carver, but it has the peculiarity of imagining that the chicken always was the separate pieces into which the carving-knife divides it."

Now I suppose that the fundamental point at issue is whether reality is more adequately

represented in the bare awareness of primordial sense consciousness, in the undifferentiated, unanalysed mass which the earliest infant and animal experience presents, or whether, on the other hand, we get an ever truer account of reality through the employment of the analytical and synthetic powers of intelligence which in our later maturity we so much use, and which we call by the proud name of reflection or reason. We confront here the rather startling question whether science really brings us nearer to the truth as it refines its methods and deepens its erudition, or whether the searcher after truth must not become as a child again, if he would enter the kingdom of incorruptible wisdom.

But we must not prejudice the question by the use of question-begging epithets. Let us seek, rather, to brighten Bergson's distinctions by an actual investigation of the methods and results of science in the two great departments of intellectual endeavour, the mental and the physical.

#### IV

### THE DISMEMBERMENT OF THE SOUL





## IV

### THE DISMEMBERMENT OF THE SOUL

PERHAPS the best way to illustrate the reconstruction of reality by the scientific intellect is to begin with a type of reality to which we have the most complete and direct access, our own inner life of thought, feeling and will, the subject-matter of psychology. The various phases of our inner life are notoriously fluctuating. One of the most striking aspects of mental life is the continuous transition within it, its uninterrupted flow, in which occur no breaks, gaps or cleavages. It might be represented, says Bergson in the *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, by a spectrum of innumerable colours each of which shades off by insensible gradations into another. Or it might be illustrated by an infinitely elastic piece of rubber drawn together into a mathematical point which is then drawn out so as to generate a line which is being indefinitely prolonged. Let us further abstract completely from the time idea associated with the process of prolongation; also

from the space through which the rubber is drawn. Let us, in short, try to realise pure movement, without admixture of artificial temporal or spatial elements: we then get a fair idea of the self in its most fundamental aspect, the aspect of pure duration.

Still, neither illustration is quite adequate to reveal the intimate nature of the inner life. The spectrum, for example, is an already completed thing, while the self is an enduring, growing, interminable process. Besides, the colours in the spectrum lie side by side, occupy space. But the inner life is completely non-spatial. The other illustration of the infinitely elastic piece of rubber which is drawn out indefinitely does indeed illustrate somewhat better non-spatial duration, but the duration is a featureless duration, lacking the qualitative wealth, the richness of colour, characteristic of the life of the mind. The inner life combines continuous duration, qualitative diversity and unity of direction. No illustration can adequately represent it. Concrete duration, which is the very essence of reality and life, cannot be represented: it can only be lived.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It would be well-nigh impossible to exaggerate the importance of the concept (!) of "pure duration" for the whole of Bergson's system. The sample of reality obtained through the intuition of the unbroken movement of our real inner life, "*le moi profond*," is for Bergson a true sample of reality as a whole, of the un-

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It is only another way of stating the idea of the concreteness and continuity of our psychical life when we say that the intimate character of any mental process or experience is determined through its organic connection with the personality as a whole, through the fact, as James expresses it, that each mental experience is a part of a personal consciousness. "It seems," says James, "as if the elementary psychic fact were not *thought*, or *that thought*, but *my thought*, every thought being owned. The universal conscious fact is not, feelings and thoughts exist,

divided or concrete (as opposed to mathematical) time which constitutes the very essence of being. Bergson's own estimate of the importance of this doctrine has been indicated in a letter to an American correspondent of the year 1911. "I daily discover (he wrote) how difficult it is to bring people's minds to the perception of real duration and to make them see it as it is—that is to say, as indivisible though moving (or rather indivisible because moving). I have scarcely done anything else in all that I have written except call attention to this; yet I am sure that I have not succeeded, for I observe that people study me and criticise me on many points rather than this one, which is the only essential one, and to which all other points should be attached, if one does not wish to run the risk of completely misunderstanding them. To any one who has gained a clear consciousness of this concrete duration, and who above all has learned to place himself again in it and habitually live in it, philosophy and reality itself take on a wholly new aspect. Many problems disappear, and reality acquires so much intensity as to become luminous of itself, without having so great need of the light which philosophers profess to bring to it."

but I think and I feel." Conscious states, that is, do not exist as isolated or sundered elements: the whole history of the individual, Bergson teaches, is somehow recapitulated and epitomised by them, the personality is present in its entirety in each of them.

But how does scientific psychology proceed in dealing with an item of experience? It begins by isolating the experience, lifting it out of its concrete connections with the living personality, and thus strips it of everything about it which is unique and distinctive. The uniqueness of the psychical process cannot reappear in the concepts of psychology for the simple reason that it is the very nature of the concept to represent only the general, the average, the recurring feature, not the individual or the unique.

If the psychologist is dealing with inclination, for example, he is obliged to neglect those inexpressible shades and nuances which distinguish my inclination, simply because it is mine, from that of any one else in the world. The psychologist's activity, to use an illustration of Bergson's, is very much like that of an artist who sketches, say, one of the towers of Notre Dame. The tower is of course an inseparable part of the cathedral as a whole, the cathedral has a certain setting within its surroundings, these are a part of the city of Paris, and so on. The tower itself, when seen in its total context,

is a thing of beauty: the sketch gives back a bloodless, fleshless skeleton, a mere shadow of the reality.

The case would not be so hopeless if psychology could dip into the mental stream and exhibit a true sample of psychic experience, no matter how small. But psychology, and every other science, for that matter, is perfectly helpless in this regard. No one, for example, could possibly convey to another an experience such as a colour, or an emotion, or an aspiration, by describing these experiences in the abstract terms of psychology, if the person had never experienced colours, emotions or aspirations for himself. The distinction here is the same as that which James makes between "acquaintance with" and "knowledge about." A person born blind might know as much about colours as Helmholtz himself, and still not know what colour was, in the sense of having an actual acquaintance with colour. And so of mental experiences generally.

Psychology, indeed, like every other science, does not proceed by partition, but by analysis. The distinction between partition and analysis, between a part and an element, Bergson illustrates in a very clever way. A child can take the parts of pasteboard animals, in the game of "sliced animals," or the parts of a map, and easily reconstruct the animals or the map. But

no one could take the letters of, say, Milton's *Lycidas*, if they were all before him in the form of printer's pie, and reconstruct that masterpiece if he had no previous knowledge of it. The reason, of course, is that the letters are not parts of the poem, but mere elements, artificial symbols. They may signify or represent reality, but they are not it, nor any part of it.

V

THE DISMEMBERMENT OF THE SOUL

(CONTINUED)





## V

### THE DISMEMBERMENT OF THE SOUL (CONTINUED)

THE question is often asked to what extent Bergson is original, and to what extent he gives us a restatement, merely, of views which have been held, in some form or other, by previous thinkers in the history of ideas. The question cannot, of course, be answered categorically, for the reason that no one knows the complete history of scientific and philosophical literature, so as to be able to say what in Bergson is entirely new, and what is second hand. Besides, the question could not easily be answered unless one knew to what extent Bergson himself was acquainted with all that has been said on the problems of life and of reality. That he is a man of many-sided learning is without question. But to master the whole of philosophical literature is to-day, at least, quite beyond human power.

One thing, however, is perfectly certain. Bergson is never content merely to repeat other men's opinions after them: he must test them for himself, and his critical powers are quite as notable as is his erudition. He tears through all

our historical distinctions, he ignores the stand-points of the schools, and he does so with an ease and an appearance of quiet confidence which quite disarms hostile opposition. Idealism and materialism, mechanism and teleology, intellectualism and pragmatism, fate and freedom: none of these time-honoured distinctions quite meets his needs. Of mechanism and purpose, for example, he says in a picturesque passage in his *Creative Evolution*: "We shall try to fit to the process of evolution the two ready-made garments of mechanism and teleology; we shall show that they do not fit, neither the one nor the other, but that one of them might be recut and resewn, and in this form fit less badly than the other."

A case in point is the standing controversy between the rationalists and the empiricists (we should perhaps say the substantialists and the phenomenologists) in psychology, the former asserting the soul to be a self-identical, changeless entity, a sort of substance, the latter insisting that it is nothing but a collection of psychical states or processes.

The whole controversy is based upon the psychological abstractionism certain phases of which we discussed in the last section. Both points of view are equally wrong because they intellectualise the mental life, i. e., translate it into abstract scientific elements, and so reduce

it to a schema, a bloodless, lifeless entity, or collection of entities, instead of the living, moving, creative thing that it is. The very essence of the psychical life is duration (*durée*) a perfect continuity in which there are no interruptions, chasms or cleavages. In order for consciousness to continue, we well know, it must change, develop — create itself ever anew.

But we already know the idiosyncrasy of the scientific intellect; it always takes the fluid process and immobilises it—it never touches reality but to transform it. For the uninterrupted process of the inner life the rationalist substitutes an unchanging entity, the “soul,” the empiricist a collection of unchanging entities, in the shape of sensations, images, perceptions, ideas, etc., thus making the life of the mind consist in the mechanical interplay of these imaginary static entities, still-states or “states,” which are in reality nothing more than verbal abstractions which have been analysed out of the living flow of the mind, the petrified symbols of mental becoming.

Analytic psychology cannot of course do otherwise than deny the existence of the soul. It is the very business of analysis to break up the concrete whole into elements or states. After psychology has analysed the concrete personality into so many elements or states it cannot, of course, expect to find it again. The word self

or soul, when applied to the sum total of these states, has no more meaning than the word Paris which the artist affixes to his various Parisian sketches or scenes.

Philosophical empiricism, therefore, originates in a misunderstanding of the very nature and significance of scientific analysis: its fundamental error consists in mistaking the last products of its analysis for ultimate reality. But it is seeking the living among the dead: the soul cannot be found somewhere among its dismembered parts, or, rather, among its symbolic substitutes. The reality has been left far behind.

The rationalist is of course equally in error. Taking his start from the results of psychological analysis, he makes it his task to bring the *disjecta membra* of psychology together again. Armed with the same methods and instruments of search as empirical psychology, he starts out in quest of the soul, hoping to find it somewhere amid the contents of the mind, as named and described by psychology. Since, however, all the discoverable contents of the mind have already been appropriated by psychology, there is nothing left for rationalism to do but to assert that the essence of the soul is pure form, a form free from all positive determination. The self is thus attenuated to a point where it loses all significance and character. It could belong

to Peter or Paul indifferently, without any one being the wiser, like an ill-fitting garment which can be worn by any number of persons for the simple reason that it fits no one of them.

Empiricism, seeking the self under the guise of some specific process, ends by denying its existence altogether; rationalism, seeking the self in the interstitial spaces, so to speak, which separate the mental states, fails to find it also. Unable, however, to deny the undoubted integrity of the mental life, rationalism manufactures a self outrightly, and ascribes to it the synthetic function of bringing together again the sundered elements of psychology.

But, as Hegel profoundly said, *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*, the truth lies in the whole. An empiricism which is truly genuine, therefore, will have nothing in common with either traditional empiricism or traditional rationalism. It will employ neither analysis nor synthesis, but intuition. It will seek to come upon the life of the soul in its first intention, to follow it through its supple movements and its inward sinuosities. Such a method, an intuition of the soul by the soul, would give us a true metaphysic of the soul, instead of a heap of bare abstractions, the conceptual symbols, the empty shells of reality.



VI

THE EXTERNAL WORLD AND THE  
WORLD OF SCIENCE





## VI

### THE EXTERNAL WORLD AND THE WORLD OF SCIENCE

WE have so far dealt with Bergson's description and criticism of the intellectualistic account of the inner life as given by the science of psychology. We come now to a more difficult part of our task, the interpretation of Bergson's view of the true nature of the external world. Is the account which science gives of that also symbolic and imperfect, and, if so, do we have any access to physical nature which is more trustworthy and penetrating than the method used by physical science?

The case against a static view of things, such as science, according to Bergson, always gives, seems to be more difficult to establish in the realm of matter, at least to the satisfaction of common sense, than in the realm of the mind. Common sense is rather ready to admit, if it can be brought to introspect carefully, that absolutely constant features in the life of the soul are difficult to identify. But when we come to the world of matter the case seems to be different.

For do we not distinguish between the physical sciences and psychology by asserting that the former deal with things, objects with comparatively permanent spatial delineations, while the subject matter of psychology is exclusively processes?

Bergson does indeed find it hard to break with the older dualism of the Cartesian type which made a clean-cut distinction between the material and the mental, and the two are often thrown into rather sharp opposition, as we shall see more fully later, when we come to the discussion of Bergson's view of the mechanism of evolution. Still, common sense and science do recognise change in nature, although this change is often so gradual as to be imperceptible. The tooth of time, all admit, will destroy the most enduring monuments of nature and of human art if only the interval taken is sufficiently long.

Science, however, after all seems to treat change as if it were something adventitious, something imposed upon nature from without. Change, for example, is often said to consist in a mere redistribution of elements which are in themselves unchangeable. Rest, inertia, is treated as if it were the native property of matter, and motion as if it were a mere function of rest. The problem of the primacy of rest or motion, permanence or change, is indeed a very ancient one, and has been recognised and dis-

cussed throughout the whole history of philosophy.

Bergson's point of view here, too, is that of radical evolutionism. The bottom property of things is duration: reality is a living spring or bound. The static view of things which science gives us is due to its taking momentary "views" of reality, snap shots, as it were, which the intellect takes of reality as it passes. Each snap shot taken of a rapidly moving object represents the object as stationary. But no matter how many such rests we add together, their sum is never a movement, just as a series of short, straight lines, placed end to end, never gives us a true curve. Real time, then, or duration, which is fluent and continuous, is broken up by science into a discrete series of static moments. Similarly, motion, equally fluent and continuous, is represented by the intellect as a simultaneity of a static series of moments of time with an equally static series of points in space, much as a railroad time table does not show the movements of trains, but only the station stops. At such a time the train is at such a place.

The failure to apprehend the true continuity of motion and change has given rise to the contradictions the impotent grappling with which makes the history of philosophy seem so much like a long drawn out and unprofitable contest of words. Zeno, using the weapons of the in-

tellectualist, proved that a "flying" arrow cannot really move, because it must at any one moment be at a given point and at no other. The solution of this ancient puzzle is that the arrow never *is* at any point of its course, because it doesn't stop. Its movement is not a sum of rests: it is absolutely indecomposable.

In fact, it is not motion and change in nature which have to be explained, but their opposite, rest. Given motion, you can explain rest readily enough in terms of movement. But if you start with absolute rest you can never get to motion. What we call rest in nature, in fact, is a derived and illusory feature: it is merely due to the relation among movements. All the objects in this room seem to be at rest; as a matter of fact, they are moving through space with a breathless velocity. The various movements are not perceptible, however, because they have the same rate and rhythm. "It is not enough," Bergson recently said in a lecture delivered at the University of London, "it is not enough to say that everything changes and moves; we must believe it. Let us assume that everything changes and moves, what will result from that proposition? The first result will be that immobility is a thing more complicated than movement. We like to say that immobility is a reality, as movement is also. We start from immobility, but if we really take seriously the

proposition that everything is in movement, that everything changes, then there is no immobility. What we call immobility is a composite — a relation between movements. This is seen from what happens if we are in a train while another train is moving in the same direction beside ours and at the same speed. We say that the second train is motionless, and the people in that train say that ours is motionless. Similarly, immobility is a relation between two or more things. Immobility is a thing more complex than movement — it consists of at least two movements.”

The same thing, Bergson adds, can be said of the “state” of things and of change. “What we call a state is the appearance which a change assumes in the eyes of a being who himself changes according to an identical or analogous rhythm.”

The sum is that the native stuff of things overflows all our scientific descriptions of it: life is vastly richer than knowledge, and reality than intellect. Our conceptual constructions do not reproduce or duplicate reality, they are simply so many *Hilfsmittel*, convenient aids to action, but without metaphysical significance. The intellect’s concepts are practical, not speculative, in their significance.

Bergson is a master of metaphor and of concrete illustration, a useful but dangerous weapon in the hands of the philosopher, when it is not

used circumspectly. But weapon-wielding is not an activity favourable to philosophic calm, and weapon-wielders have never been noted for the delicate quality of their artistry. The reader should be warned, therefore, against taking Bergson's illustrations as anything more than they are meant to be, suggestions and illustrations of the truth, rather than complete expositions of it. It would clearly be unjust to Bergson to try to make his illustrations "walk on all fours," to extend them beyond a point where they cease to illustrate.

The intellect, he suggests somewhere in his *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, may be likened to a prism through which white light is passed. Just as the white light is decomposed into the various colours of the spectrum, so reality is always shattered by being passed through the intellect. There is an important point, however, upon which Bergson always insists: you can take reality and analyse it into elements, but you can by no means reconstruct reality out of the elements which are the product of your analysis, in the way you can recompose the colours of the spectrum and get white light again. Analysis, it will be remembered, gives us only elements, never parts. Science does not proceed by partition, but by reconstruction.

Elsewhere he uses another illustration to make

clear the merely representative character of scientific symbolism, the fact that the concepts of the intellect are mere surrogates of reality, rather than samples of it. Reality, he says, is like a gold coin for which one has received change in baser metal. The gold coin is homogeneous and intrinsically precious. Its value (let us say) is the value actually represented by the gold contained in it. But the baser coins are merely so many counters; they serve as a medium of exchange, and as such they are valuable. But aside from this practical use to which they are put, they have no interest for us whatsoever. Like the counters of science, they have no intrinsic value. They are intrinsically unreal.

This, in brief outline, constitutes the attack upon the intellect with which Bergson is often charged. And the result is indeed hardly calculated to support the proud claims often made for scientific knowledge. "Instead of intellectual knowledge being the profounder," James says, interpreting Bergson, "he calls it the more superficial. Instead of being the only adequate knowledge, it is grossly inadequate, and its only superiority is the practical one of enabling us to make short cuts through experience and thereby to save time. Dive back into the flux itself, then, Bergson tells us, if you wish to *know* real-

ity, that flux which Platonism, in its strange belief that only the immutable is excellent, has always spurned; turn your face towards sensation, that flesh-bound thing which rationalism has always loaded with abuse."



VII

SOME FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS OF  
SCIENTIFIC RECONSTRUCTION



## VII

### SOME FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC RECONSTRUCTION

WE have dealt thus at length with Bergson's criticism of scientific symbolism because many of his other doctrines, as will be seen more fully later, are thoroughly affected by his fundamental view of the nature of science, and the ultimate validity of its categories and formulas. Many of the current philosophical views of the world and of life, such as the existence of mechanical causation, the nature and method of evolution, the freedom of the will, and the place of life and mind in reality, depend upon certain presuppositions and theories of science which are generally taken as ultimate truth, at least until they are superseded by other data of a similar kind. But suppose these presuppositions and theories turn out to be merely a vast system of symbols which have a high value for the purposes of controlling nature, but have otherwise no speculative or metaphysical validity? This is precisely what Bergson maintains.

It is only fair to Bergson to say that the

criticism of scientific concepts and formulas which is such a striking feature of his philosophy is not by any means original with him, but that discussions of a similar sort have been carried on in various quarters for more than a generation, not to mention the profound reaction to intellectualism represented by the philosophies of Jacobi, Schelling and their fellow romanticists near the opening of the nineteenth century.

Much, for instance, has lately been said about the merely "abstract" or "hypothetical" character of scientific laws, the fact, that is, that these laws, often said to be exact, are not actually exemplified in nature, but hold only when they are taken abstractly, i. e., when they operate, not under actual, but under hypothetical conditions, conditions which are nowhere realised. An illustration or two will make this clear. We shall do well to take our illustrations from the most exact sciences which we have, mathematics and mechanics.

The three angles of a triangle are said to equal two right angles, but this is true only of an abstract or imaginary triangle, and applies to no case of a triangle found in nature. Sir Oliver Lodge has recently called attention to the difference between such an abstract triangle, a purely mathematical object, and the concrete one drawn, for example, on the surface of a calm

sheet of water. The surface here, though perhaps as flat as ever found in nature, is not flat, but is part of a sphere, and the proposition does not hold.

Or take another instance. The proposition that one and one make two is, if these numbers are taken in the abstract, quite beyond controversy. But are we so sure that one and one make two when we are dealing, not with abstract numbers, but with concrete objects? "It is not true," Lodge reminds us, "for two globules of mercury, for instance, nor for a couple of colliding stars; not true for a pint of water, added to a pint of oil of vitriol, not for nitric oxide added to oxygen, nor for the ingredients of an explosive mixture; not necessarily true, either, for snakes in a cage, or for capital invested in a business concern, flourishing or otherwise; nor is it true, save in a temporary manner, for a couple of trout added to a pond. Life can ridicule arithmetic."

A still more enlightening illustration, perhaps, is that of the law of the lever, taken from mechanics. This law states that equilibrium is maintained when the weights at each side of the fulcrum are equal. But in order for this law to hold, a number of conditions must be fulfilled. The lever must be of homogeneous structure and absolutely rigid; the fulcrum must be a mathematical point, so as to exclude the possibility of

friction; the weights must be of such a nature as not to affect the lever by anything except their actual weight, etc. But, evidently, these conditions are neither separately nor collectively realised in any actual case of a lever in operation. The law of the lever, again, holds only in the abstract, that is, under purely hypothetical conditions.

What applies in the above instances applies to all laws of nature whatsoever. The only cases in which they are really exact are the cases in which they are abstractly or hypothetically stated. In nature they are never more than roughly approximated.

The reader acquainted with modern philosophical literature and with the literature on the methods of science will have recognised motives in the foregoing account of Bergson which appear also in a large number of thinkers belonging to every type of scientific and philosophical persuasion. Hegel himself, that most abused of "intellectualists," had an almost immodest share in the criticism of concepts, a fact seldom sensed by professional anti-Hegelians who, it appears, often expend more energy hating Hegel than reading him. The most important names among more recent writers are those of Laas, Dilthey, Vaihinger, Mach, Marchesini, Lipps, Hertz, Ostwald, Poincaré, F. Klein, and Bertrand Russell, but there is a score of others. An extensive ac-

count of the literature, together with a comprehensive discussion of the whole subject, will be found in the great work of Vaihinger, recently published, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob, The Philosophy of the Fictitious*, to which the German-reading student may go if he wishes to follow the subject further.

That psychologists, at least, labour under no misapprehensions as to the ultimate significance of psychological concepts is illustrated by the following vigorous passage, taken from Münsterberg's *Psychology and Life*, which is typical of the views, expressed or understood, of a large number of leading psychologists:

“Natural science considers the world as a mechanism, and for that purpose transforms the reality in a most complicated and ingenious way. It puts in the place of the perceivable objects unperceivable atoms which are merely products of mathematical construction, quite unlike any known thing. . . . There is, indeed, no physical object in the world which science ought not to transmute into atoms, but no atom in the world has physical reality; and these two statements do not contradict each other.

In the same way psychology is right, but the psychologism which considers the psychological elements and their mechanism as reality is wrong from its root to its top, and this psychologism is not a bit better than materialism. . . . A

psychical elements . . . has as little reality as have the atoms of the physicist. Our body is not a heap of atoms, our inner life is still less a heap of ideas and feelings and emotions and volitions, if we are to take these mental things in the way the psychologist has to take them, as contents of consciousness made up of psychical elements."



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## VIII

### THE TRUE METHOD OF METAPHYSICS: INTUITION

WHAT, then, is the net result so far as man's ability to fathom the nature of reality is concerned? Does Bergson's doctrine issue in scepticism or agnosticism, as Mr. H. Wildon Carr and others have suggested?

That would be the case, Bergson answers, if man were pure intellect, and if the only kind of knowledge accessible to man were scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge, pursued exclusively, does indeed lead to relativism and scepticism. But man is not shut up to the necessity of always transmuting reality into scientific concepts and symbols. There is an entirely different method of approaching truth. This method, as has been already hinted, is intuition.

It is unfortunate that the philosopher must employ terms which have long been in common use, or else run the risk of not being understood at all. Such words become smooth and characterless, like coins which have long been in circulation. What is the meaning of the term intuition, as used so commonly in everyday

speech, and in philosophy and theology? One cannot give the meaning of the term, for it has no one meaning; one can only give its meanings, of which, omitting the more unusual and technical, there seem to be about four.

It is used, in the first place, as the equivalent of sense-perception, the immediate apprehension of physical reality, as when one examines an object, like an orange, and receives the various sense impressions, visual, tactual, olfactory and other, which seem to emanate from it. It is used, secondly, for introspection, for the immediate apprehension of our inner states, as when one observes introspectively some emotion, impulse or train of ideas which runs its course in the mind. Intuition is also used, third, for an alleged immediate, that is, unreasoned, knowledge of certain so-called first principles, fundamental truths, etc., like the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the like, which, though unreasoned, are said to be known with the certainty of mathematical axioms. Finally, the term is used in a somewhat more cabalistic sense to stand for a sort of mystical approach to truth, a process in which ecstatic and emotional promptings figure conspicuously, a sort of ineffable illumination or supernatural vision, quite unlike the various more mundane forms of sensory and intellectual knowledge known to orthodox science and philosophy.

In which of these various senses, if any, does Bergson employ the term intuition? James drops an interesting hint in the passage in *A Pluralistic Universe* which was quoted above, according to which intuition means simply sense perception, a "turning toward sensation, that flesh-bound thing which rationalism has always loaded with abuse." The contrast, as James outlines it, is simply between immediate sense perception, on the one hand, and conceptual knowledge, on the other, an interpretation which seems to have been suggested more by James' own epistemological predilections than by a careful reading of Bergson's text.

It would be an interesting philological task to collect and to study comparatively the various passages referring to intuition which are scattered throughout Bergson's writings. Such a study would certainly show that intuition is not the same as the intellectual or conceptual knowledge of science; it would almost as certainly show, I think, that it is something more active and esoteric than sensational or perceptual knowledge, as this is ordinarily understood. If any ambiguity attaches to the term it must be that the experience referred to is one which cannot easily be conveyed by description, thus supporting (and shall we say refuting?) Bergson's position with regard to the communicability of any first-hand experience. And Bergson more

than once hints that each man must exercise intuition for himself if he would know what reality, and, I presume, what intuition is.<sup>1</sup>

This does not, however, prevent Bergson from trying, time and again, to convey some notion of what he means by intuition. "If it isn't clear," some one has said, "it isn't French." Well, if the meaning of intuition in Bergson is not clear, it is certainly not the fault of Bergson, who is too sincerely French to repeat the well-worn trick of dealing with a difficulty by studiously avoiding it.

In *Creative Evolution* he refers repeatedly to a "vague nebulosity" which surrounds the "luminous nucleus" which we call the intellect. "Therein," he asserts, "reside certain powers that are complementary to the understanding, powers of which we have only an indistinct feeling when we remain shut up in ourselves, but which will become clear and distinct when they perceive themselves at work, so to speak, in the evolution of nature."

Elsewhere in the same work he says: "The feeling we have of our evolution and of the evolution of all things is there, forming around the intellectual concept properly so-called an indistinct fringe that fades off into darkness. . . .

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to an American correspondent Bergson writes that his intuition of duration "répugne à l'essence même du langage," i. e., it is essentially ineffable, an esoteric mystery.

This nucleus has been formed out of the rest by condensation, and . . . the whole must be used, the fluid as well as and more than the condensed, in order to grasp the inner movement of life. Indeed, if the fringe exists, however delicate and indistinct, it should have more importance for philosophy than the bright nucleus it surrounds. For it is its presence that enables us to affirm that the nucleus is a nucleus, that pure intellect is a contraction, by condensation, of a more extensive power. And, just because this vague intuition is of no help in directing our action on things, which action takes place exclusively on the surface of reality, we may presume that it is to be exercised not merely on the surface, but below."

A favourite way of describing intuition is to say that it is a process of installing oneself within reality, transporting oneself into the process of becoming itself, rather than taking mere "views" of it from without. "On appelle intuition," Bergson says in a critical passage in his *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, "cette espèce de sympathie intellectuelle par laquelle on se transporte à l'intérieur d'un objet pour coïncider avec ce qu'il a d'unique et par conséquent d'inexprimable." "Intuition is a kind of intellectual sympathy in virtue of which one installs himself within the object in order to come upon that in the object which is unique and

hence inexpressible.” This is contrasted with analysis which is “the operation by which one reduces the object to such elements as are already known, such as the object has in common with other objects.”

The notion of intuition does not give us much trouble so long as we confine ourselves to the observation of our own inner life, for we doubtless do have an immediate and sympathetic acquaintance with our thoughts, emotions and will-attitudes which no one can take from us, and which no amount of psychological description could possibly replace. Intuition of the inner life might, then, mean simply living it, and grasping the whole of it in a single, sympathetic view. In such an intuition, as we have already seen, the terms and distinctions of the psychology books would be completely left behind, and the soul life would be apprehended in its indivisible unity — a unity in which there would be no external juxtaposition of parts, previously scissored out of the concrete flow of experience, and no sharply sundered before and after, but a complete interpenetration of phases, each phase qualifying and impregnating every other. The content of intuition is pure “duration”; intuition is just this non-analytical appreciation of the unbroken flow of inner experiences — unbroken except for the qualitative modulations within it, those variations of colour and em-



phasis which render our inner life so replete with interest and vicissitude.

So far the matter is simple enough. But when we come to inquire into the power of intuition to penetrate external nature (provided we really mean more by intuition than simple sense perception), the problem becomes decidedly more difficult. Precisely what, we may ask, does Bergson mean by installing oneself within a reality other than ourselves? He evidently does not mean to suggest a mere extension of our perceptual knowledge by an exploration of the object's inner structure, as when we cut into the earth's crust in order to learn its geological formation. The inner life of an object, in Bergson's sense, would hardly be revealed by such an anatomical investigation, any more than the psychical life which is supposed to go in the brain would be revealed by a study of its inner structure, or any more than the life of a college, or college spirit, could be found by looking inside the buildings rather than at their out-sides.

The phrase "intellectual sympathy" used by Bergson in the definition of intuition quoted above seems to suggest the answer. The process of intuition appears to involve an ascription to nature of a psychical life similar to our own. It is only by thus animating it, by viewing it in impassioned contemplation, that

I can penetrate nature's outward shell, and enter into the true inwardness of its life. This seems to be the meaning of Bergson's statement that knowledge implies a coincidence of the mind with the generative act of reality, with the evolution of things: the only way to know an object, he often asserts, is to become it. We seem to have here the familiar thought of idealism that there must an ontological affinity between the mind and its object if the mind is really to know its object.

The reader acquainted with the philosophy of Leibniz must have noticed that the phases of Bergson's doctrine just touched upon are rather distinctly reminiscent of certain characteristic views of the illustrious German savant of the seventeenth century. Reality, according to Leibniz, consists ultimately of monads, indivisible centers of sentiency and energy, each of which, as the name implies, is completely self-enclosed, completely cut off from its surroundings. It is a true individual. Monads, to use the picturesque language of Leibniz, have no windows, so that nothing can enter into them or pass out. If that is the case, how can one monad ever know the other? How can the monad which is the soul, for example, ever know the world?

It is possible, Leibniz answers, only because each monad is the world in miniature; it is a

microcosm reflecting the world in its entirety within its own inner life. Upon its little stage the drama of the world is re-enacted. "Everything is in everything," a French writer has said, and Tennyson suggests that if we knew the flower in the crannied wall, root and branch, that is, if we had an intimate and exhaustive knowledge of it, then we should know what God and man are. The typical character of every item of reality seems to be in mind in both these statements.



IX

THE TRUE METHOD OF META-  
PHYSICS: INTUITION

(CONTINUED)



## IX

### THE TRUE METHOD OF METAPHYSICS: INTUITION (CONTINUED)

It will perhaps aid us in getting some notion of the intellectual sympathy of which Bergson speaks, the *Miterleben*, that sharing of the inner life of the reality which we aspire to grasp, if we remind ourselves of some illustrations of this process with which we are acquainted in our experience.

The projection of our own ideas and feelings into the mind of another person is of course a very familiar process, and the hopeless inability of two persons to understand each other if there exists between them some invincible discrepancy of temperament or point of view is one of the most familiar of human experiences. The only way to understand a writer or an historical figure, we often hear, is to suppress, for the time being, one's own merely private personality or selfhood, to take the point of view of the person concerned, etc.

The nearest analogue to this partial assimilation of subject and object in our relation with

what is usually considered the inanimate world is the process of so-called æsthetic sympathy (the German *Einfühlung*) by which, to use the words of Groos, "we live through the psychic life which a lifeless object would experience if it possessed a mental life like our own."

Many writers on æsthetics have indeed made this humanising of the object of æsthetic appreciation the essential condition of the æsthetic gratification which it yields. So the poet Schiller, to cite only one notable instance, defined the nature of beauty to be freedom-in-the-appearance, or phenomenal freedom, which, translated into everyday English, simply means that any object, in order to appear beautiful, must have the appearance of freedom, must be free from any trace of constraint or stress. Thus, a rugged oak, a beautiful vase, a slender birch, or, to use Schiller's crowning instance, a beautiful personality, all alike convey the suggestion of poised self-mastery, of perfect freedom. In all these cases the process of *Einfühlung*, or empathy, as Professor Titchener has recently called it, seems to take place. We imagine the object as capable of feeling distress incident to outward constraint, the exhilaration and joy of freedom, etc.

Bergson, indeed, in a significant passage in *Creative Evolution*, makes the identical comparison between metaphysical and æsthetic intuition



of which we are here speaking. "That an effort of this kind," Bergson says, referring to intuition, "is not impossible, is proved by the existence in man of an æsthetic faculty along with normal perception. Our eye perceives the features of a living being merely as assembled, not as mutually organised. The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model." In more than one place, indeed, especially in the *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, Bergson compares the philosopher with the poet. Neither employs the method of analysis upon which science exclusively relies: their common method is intuition.

The whole point of view presented here will doubtless be better appreciated by the nature poet of the Wordsworthian type than by the scientist or philosopher whose finer perception has, according to Bergson, been dulled, and his power of immediate insight stultified, by the method of scientific indirection which he has long practised. Writers on literature have of course made much of the peculiar gifts of the poet, and poetry abounds in passages the sweep and in-

sight of which does sometimes seem to place the poet under a category exclusively his own. One of the most notable examples of nature animation and of dramatic sympathy with nature's supposed inner life is the exquisite piece of rhetoric in Part V of Browning's *Paracelsus*, the first lines of which could not be improved upon as a description of Bergson's distinction between intellect and instinct:

I knew, I felt (perception unexpressed,  
Uncomprehended by our narrow thought,  
But somehow felt and known in every shift  
And change of the spirit,— nay in every pore  
Of the body, even),— what God is, what we are,  
What life is —, etc.

That the psychic life of nature is merely projected into nature dramatically by man is suggested by Browning with a clearness which ought to satisfy even so disenchanted a critic of Bergson as Mr. Santayana, who appears to see in this philosopher little more than a "literary psychologist":

Not alone

For their possessor dawn those qualities,  
But the new glory mixes with the heaven  
And earth; man, once descried, imprints forever  
His presence on all lifeless things: the winds  
Are henceforth voices, wailing or a shout,  
A querulous mutter or a quick gay laugh,  
Never a senseless gust now man is born.

The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,  
 A secret they assemble to discuss  
 When the sun drops behind their trunks which  
     glare

Like grates of hell: the peerless cup afloat  
 Of the lake-lily is an urn, some nymph  
 Swims bearing high above her head: no bird  
 Whistles unseen, but through the gaps above  
 That let light in upon the gloomy woods,  
 A shape peeps from the breezy forest-top,  
 Arch with small puckered mouth and mocking eye.  
 The morn has enterprise, deep quiet droops  
 With evening, triumph takes the sunset hour,  
 Voluptuous transport ripens with the corn  
 Beneath the warm moon like a happy face:  
     and so on.

The passage is too long for citation *in extenso*, but the reader may be interested to turn to it and read it in full for a masterly illustration of an animism such as Bergson seems to advocate. This is of course not offered as an isolated instance of its kind, as nature personification, in its various types and grades, is one of the most common devices employed by the literary artist.

That the act of intuition is a difficult one is for Bergson beyond doubt, and he often insists upon it. One cannot read the *Introduction*, for example, in which Bergson often reiterates the difficulty of intuition, and ever confuse it again with the process of simple sense perception, as James seems to do.

The coarse necessity of living and acting, as Bergson somewhere puts it, and the intellectual instrumentalities made necessary thereby, have accustomed us to a certain side-by-sideness of things, a certain crust or covering of spatial framework, which has all but ruined our sight for the inner unity of life, the intention of life in its living wholeness.

Intuition in man is but vague and intermittent. "It is a lamp almost extinguished, which glimmers only now and then, for a few moments at most. But it glimmers wherever a vital interest is at stake. On our personality, on our liberty, on the place we occupy in the whole of nature, on our origin and perhaps also on our destiny, it throws a light feeble and vacillating, but which none the less pierces the darkness of the night in which the intellect leaves us." These fleeting intuitions, which now light up their object only at distant intervals, philosophy ought to seize upon, to sustain, to expand, and at last unite. The more it advances, the more clearly will it see that intuition is mind itself, and, in a certain sense, life itself.

X

OF EVOLUTION AND CREATION



## X

### OF EVOLUTION AND CREATION

WE have now sketched roughly the groundwork of Bergson's system, upon which, as we said, much else depends. It will be possible to indicate only briefly, in conclusion, a few of the main metaphysical positions which seem to result from the general view Bergson takes of the nature of intellectual knowledge, and from that more intimate view of the inwardness of nature which intuition affords.

The three theories of Bergson which will likely prove of most general interest are his theories of evolution, of the existence in nature of design, and of the freedom of the will. Let us take these problems up in their order.

One of the difficult points in the interpretation of Bergson's system is to ascertain the precise status of matter in the universe. In spite of the universal animism which Bergson often appears to teach, we find him throwing mind and matter into rather sharp opposition, as if they were two entirely discrepant and non-equitable principles, like oil and water, which will mingle but not mix.

It is rather important to call attention to this point here, for evolution seems to be largely the outcome of an incessant struggle between these two fundamental forces. Life seems to be the active principle, and matter a refractory something, a sort of weight or foil, with which life has to keep up an incessant struggle. The life force at the bottom of all evolution might be compared with the energy of a burning rocket which raises it through the air, while matter might be likened to the rocket itself, whose inertia has constantly to be overcome, and which falls to the earth again as soon as the force inside it has become sufficiently weak, or has spent itself. Life is in one place summarily described as a tendency to act on inert matter. Intelligence and instinct are said to be, at an early stage of evolution, "prisoners of a matter which they are not yet able to control." Elsewhere Bergson speaks of human action being exercised on matter, of our being able to act only with inert matter for an instrument, of the movement of life being "up," while the movement of matter is an inverse movement, an "undivided movement of descent," and so on.

Whether the notion of matter as a substance entirely disparate from life is really consonant with the rest of Bergson's system, or whether it is intrinsically intelligible, it does serve a rather important dialectical purpose here because it



tends to throw into clear relief another idea which is of capital importance for any theory of evolution that is to prove at all satisfactory.

This is the notion of the vital impulse, the *élan vital*, a sort of tension or inner urgency which is the real driving force of evolution, the power behind the whole of things, without which there could be no change or development at all.

In order to bring out the full significance of this principle, let us contrast Bergson's view of evolution with the reigning natural science theory of it (let us call it the hangman theory, for short) according to which the prevalence of efficient forms of animal life, for example, together with all the delicate adaptations existing in nature, are explained by the destructive effect of the environment acting mechanically upon the poorly adapted or unfit forms. Thus nature will exercise a "preferential selection" of animal forms, say, equipped with good protective covering, with organs of defence, like horns or claws, with fleetness of foot, ferocity, endurance, sensory acuteness, and other such features having "survival value." Nature stands by, like an executioner, ready to cut down such forms as are not able, on account of their inferior equipment, to maintain themselves.

Thus, through the action of "natural selection," the fittest always survive, and tend to transmit, through heredity, their valuable traits

to their offspring. In this way the gradual improvement which seems to be taking place in all departments of nature and life is said to be completely explained.

Two points are worthy of notice. One is that the factors involved in bringing about change or evolution, namely natural selection and heredity, are so-called natural factors, that is, they are blind or mechanical in their operation. In the second place, their activity is merely negative and critical, not creative or productive: they merely destroy ill-adapted forms, and at most maintain those which happen to be well adjusted to the conditions under which they are to exist. Their function, if we may say so, is not productive, but only permissive.

Well, it does not take an unusual power of reflection to see that a purely critical and destructive agency cannot account for the continual origination of things, although it may very well account for their survival after they have once come into existence. It is plain that in order for an executioner to have employment he must have subjects. In order for the forces of nature to eliminate forms, there must be forms to eliminate — there must be a tendency on the part of nature to produce organisms and variations before the environment can begin its selective and destructive industry. But this

point, important as it is, seems to be rather neglected by current evolution theories.

Science has of course often noticed the redundancy of nature from whose prolific lap spring countless forms of life, so many, indeed, as often to be unable to maintain themselves on the limited means of subsistence which nature affords, like parents who bring more children into the world than they are able decently to rear. But the very thing which science presupposes or treats as negligible has been thought by philosophers to be of first-rate importance for a theory of the universe, and many of them, including Bergson himself, have raised what seemed to many an unimportant point into a central principle.<sup>1</sup> The most fundamental tendency of na-

<sup>1</sup> Science has indeed been sufficiently troubled by such phenomena as discontinuous variation, of regeneration, repair, of growth through exercise, and the like, which not only are not explained by natural selection, but which even suggest a creative principle and the existence of purpose in nature. The hope of science, however, has always been to bring these phenomena under the domination of purely mechanistic hypotheses. Read, for example, Henderson, *The Fitness of the Environment*, especially Chapter VIII. After some consideration of the anomalous phenomena above referred to, Mr. Henderson concludes: "To sum up, it appears certain that at least in a few instances, and possibly quite generally, purposeful tendencies exist in the organism which seem to be inexplicable by natural selection or any other existing mechanistic hypothesis. It is not too much to hope that a scientific explanation of these phenomena in

ture, and that which is after all the most interesting for our view of the universe, is not the tendency to cut off and destroy, but to form and create.

The notion of variation as intrinsically a form of self-expression on the part of the organism itself has, of course, been often discussed since the days of Lamarck, Goethe and Chambers. It receives a brilliant corroboration from a fresh point of view to-day by Bergson.

The living spring or thrust, which is nature at its deepest, the will to live and struggle, without which nature would be like a broken bow robbed of its resiliency, is perhaps most effectively illustrated by the individual organism, whose survival, as we well know, depends not merely upon its environment, but upon itself. Its chances for life are good in direct proportion as it shows conative energy, as it is plucky and "quick on its feet."

Paulsen has stated the whole case admirably: "The presupposition of all development, without which the above-mentioned principles (natural selection, etc.) would have no support for their activity is, of course, the will to live, the will to struggle for existence, common to all things taking part in evolution. They do not suffer whole or in part may some day be found; but meantime they constitute the natural subject of vitalistic speculation."

the development passively; they are not, like the pebbles in the brook, pushed into a new form by mechanical causes acting from without. Their own activity is the absolute condition for the efficacy of natural selection. The struggle for existence is not imposed upon individuals from without; it is their own will to fight the battle; and without this will, the will to preserve and exercise individual life and produce and preserve offspring, there would be no such struggle for existence at all."

Unless such a productive and active principle is presupposed, it does seem as if the process of evolution could never get going. Nature, like a vast engine with its power exhausted, would lie helpless and prone, a monstrous corpse from which every trace of life had fled, instead of being what she is, a thing pulsing with power and life, moving forward, with an inexhaustible energy and prolific vitality, through the countless forms and phases which constitute the universe's eventful history.

A leading characteristic of Bergson's theory of evolution, which seems to be in a way a corollary of the foregoing, is that evolution is a *devenir réel*, is genuinely creative, making real additions to the past and the present each pulsing moment. Creation is not some mythical event enacted once for all at some mythical beginning of things, as represented by an outworn

theology, nor is it a mere shuffling of cards, an eternal redistribution of matter and energy, as pictured by an equally obsolete evolutionism. Evolution means the genuine elaboration of novelty, an actual augmentation of reality, in which fresh items of being, unprecedented features, spring constantly into existence.

And there are no prophets! There might be if history were merely the unwinding of a scheme of things once for all forged in the eternities. But it is not. Rather is it "a progress to ever new creations, to conclusions incommensurable with the premises and indeterminable by relation to them." Nature, like our own personality, "shoots, grows and ripens without ceasing." The future is not made, but in the making. It presents an infinity of unredeemed possibilities. Its unfolding constitutes true history. Man is not facing his destiny, but his opportunity.

XI  
OF MECHANISM AND DESIGN





## XI

### OF MECHANISM AND DESIGN

A QUESTION which has often interested poets and philosophers is whether nature as a whole is purposive, whether there exists some

One far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves,

or whether the events and processes of nature are blind, unaware, that is, of their tendency and objective, like a boulder, shed by some moon or star, which rushes through the vast reaches of space ignorant of itself, and ignorant of where and how its career is to eventuate.

Bergson has briefly answered this question in a general way in a passage which has been already quoted in another connection. Neither mechanism nor finalism, he there said, would really fit evolution, but finalism "might be recut and re-sewn, and in the new form fit less badly than the other."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That the method by which one approaches the study of evolution will profoundly affect the classic alternative of mechanism and teleology is well illustrated by the

That evolution is not purely mechanical, its results, Bergson thinks, sufficiently show. The most convincing disproof of pure mechanism is the phenomenon of "convergence" in evolution, by which Bergson simply means the production of similar results by separate lines of development. The eyes of mollusks and vertebrates, for example, though very similar, have been developed along different and independent lines of

following passage from Professor Royce's *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Lecture XII), in which he is elaborating the pregnant distinction between the point of view of "description" and that of "appreciation," a distinction which corresponds roughly to the Bergsonian one between scientific analysis and intuition: "An evolution is a series of events that in itself is purely physical,—a set of necessary occurrences in the world of space and time. An egg develops into a chick; a poet grows up from infancy; a nation emerges from barbarism; a planet condenses from the fluid state, and develops the life that for millions of years makes it so wondrous a place. Look upon all these things descriptively, and you shall see nothing but matter moving instant after instant, each instant containing in its full description the necessity of passing over into the next. Nowhere will there be, for descriptive science, any genuine novelty or any discontinuity admissible. But look at the whole appreciatively, historically, synthetically, as a musician listens to a symphony, as a spectator watches a drama. Now you shall seem to have seen, in phenomenal form, a story. . . . In taking such a view are you likely to be coming nearer to the inner truth of things? Yes; for the consciousness of the Logos must be one that essentially transcends our own temporal time-limitations; and in so far as we view sequences in their wholeness, we are therefore likely to be approaching the unity of his world-possessing insight."

evolution, as if they were after all not due to accident, that mythical bearer of a thousand burdens, but were "made for seeing." The theory of mechanism would have to be abandoned for some form of teleology "if it could be proved that life may manufacture like apparatus by unlike means, on divergent lines of evolution;" and the case for teleology would be strong in proportion to "the divergency between the lines of evolution thus chosen, and to the complexity of the similar structures found in them."

But if nature is an artificer, she is a somewhat unpractised, bungling artificer, if one may judge by our human standards of valuation, which are the only ones accessible to us. There is many a miscarriage in nature, and many a blind alley, and abandoned path, eloquent souvenirs at once of her prodigal methods and her unfailing resourcefulness. Evolution is, in fact, a species of improvisation, an experiment in creation on a vast scale, in which much survives and is carried on, and much falls by the way. There seems to be, in any case, no single objective towards which nature moves, as it were, by the shortest road. Developments occur along many divergent paths: evolution is not linear, but sheaf-like in its unfolding, as if there were not one goal, but many; as if, at any rate, there were different ways of approach to the same ultimate destination.

The two fundamental forms of psychical life,

instinct and intelligence, for example, do not represent successive stages of a linear development, but rather divergent courses which evolution has pursued. "The cardinal error," Bergson maintains, "which from Aristotle onwards has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life three successive degrees of the development of the same tendency, whereas they are three divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew." It has come about, in any case, that intellect and instinct have become pretty completely differentiated on different lines of evolution, "intellect," as Mr. Russell wittily says, "being mainly the misfortune of man, while instinct is seen at its best in ants, bees and Bergson!"

The truth is that nature is neither so blind nor so providential as the sharp alternatives developed in the heat of partisan controversies of an older day suggest. The powers of nature, as Browning has it, are

Neither put forth blindly, nor controlled  
Calmly by perfect knowledge.

Nature's progress is much like that of a missile hurled from the hand: we know that it is moving and we know its general direction; but what its eventual destination will be, no one can with any assurance predict.

Thus is much of our wisdom concerning the ends of nature no better than foolishness. The purposes of God in nature, if they truly exist, are, by our human faculty, in the end unfathomable. One thinks of the fine word of Santayana, speaking of Spinoza, that great teacher of the essential unsearchableness of the divine wisdom: "When people tell us that they have the key to all reality in their pockets, or in their hearts, that they know who made the world, and why, or know that everything is matter, or that everything is mind — then Spinoza's notion of the absolutely infinite, which included *all* possibilities, may profitably arise before us. It will counsel us to say to those little gnostics, to those circumnavigators of being: I do not believe you; God is great."



## XII

### THE FREEDOM OF MAN





## XII

### THE FREEDOM OF MAN

IF evolution is genuinely creative, elaborating new forms of reality unceasingly, it would seem as if the pulsations of our human will, when we strive, aspire and attain, might represent the very birth-throbs by which new forms of life and reality were constantly being produced. Our acts might then truly be turning places, as James splendidly puts it, where we catch reality in the making.

That human acts are machine-made, many persons, turned scientists, have indeed asserted; but that men really make history, and really "do things," the same scientists, when they turn men again, and relapse into their tender-minded state (or is it tough?) seldom have the hardihood to deny.

The interminable controversy between the champions of free will and the champions of determinism, as is usually the case with such controversies, rests, according to Bergson, upon a fundamental misunderstanding, the same misunderstanding as that between empiricism and

rationalism in their controversy regarding the existence of the soul. All parties make the initial blunder of starting with the mosaic account of the mental life furnished by analytical psychology, an account which, as we know, substitutes for the living, concrete self — the fundamental self, as Bergson calls it — a set of symbols, a phantom self, made up of a plurality of discrete mental “states,” arranged in juxtaposition, by the mechanical play and interplay of which all actions are to be explained.

The psychologist, for example, speaks of sympathy, love, hate, etc., as though these were so many independent, isolated forces, whose several impulsive energies were somehow determinable, and from the resultant forces of which actions can be calculated. We are here simply imposed upon by a trick of language which denotes an infinite number of nuances by the same general name. For each of us has his own way of loving and hating: in fact each separate act of loving and hating is non-reproduceable, because its particular quality and colour are determined by the personality as a whole in the moment of emotional and impulsive stress, and the personality is never the same at any two successive instants.

The failure to distinguish the concrete, fundamental self from the artificial reconstruction of it which psychology gives us accounts for

the invincible discrepancy between the "feeling" of freedom, and the scientific conviction of determinism. A dead-lock is indeed inevitable here for the simple reason that one party is moving within the super-intellectual (Kant would have said the intelligible) realm, while the other is moving within the realm of the scientific understanding. But freedom can never be understood: it can only be lived.

The type of determinism just discussed, in which action is supposed to be determined by the interaction of discrete mental states, might be called psychological or associationist determinism, as distinguished from physical determinism, according to which mental states are determined by brain states. Here again it must be remembered that the whole framework of interconnecting mental and brain states in parallel series is a conceptual construction, an hypothesis, which has never received, and, in the nature of the case, never can receive, empirical verification sufficiently extensive to give the parallelist view any other status than that of a working hypothesis. We do, indeed, have an apparent parallelism between certain observed members of the physical and the mental series within a limited range; but to extend this parallelism to the two series in their totality would be to settle the whole problem of freedom in advance.

Bergson's view of the relation of the mind to the brain, which he has recently expressed, especially in his lectures at the University of London, in fact entirely reverses the views of this relation which are commonly held.

The brain is usually thought to furnish the physical conditions for the rise and reminiscence of conscious experience. It is thought to be the place where memories are somehow stored and held in readiness to be recalled upon occasion. Memory in Bergson, however, is a purely psychical, disembodied faculty, the brain acting merely as a selective tool which permits only useful experiences to rise above the threshold of consciousness.

The view that the brain does not produce consciousness, but merely transmits it, just as window glass merely transmits the daylight which already exists outdoors, has of course been exploited by James in the interest of immortality in his well-known little book called by that name. In Bergson, too, the brain's function is merely transmissive rather than productive. Just as light, heat or electricity cannot pass through matter by any path, but must take whatever route it can, whatever path it finds most pervious, so consciousness can express itself only through such forms of matter as it finds pervious to the particular kind of energy which it represents. The brain might then be

thought of as composed of a kind of matter fitted to act as the carrier of consciousness, a kind which, so to speak, consciousness can penetrate.

The main significance of the brain in Bergson, however, is not derived from the fact that it transmits ideas, but from the fact that it fails to do so! So far from the brain's being an organ of reminiscence, it is rather an organ of oblivion! It acts as a sort of mask or screen which shuts the great mass of our ideas from view. The purpose of ideas and experiences, it must be remembered, is the guidance of action. But in order that action may be effective, only such ideas must be recalled as are relevant to the situation or the problem towards which action is pointed. Without the intervention of the brain the flow of ideas would be so copious as to paralyse action. Hamlet's inability to act might thus be explained as a lack of cerebral inhibition, resulting in an exuberance of mentation which literally paralysed the will.

But we cannot follow these interesting psychophysical speculations further. Let us go straight to our point. Is man truly free in his actions, or is he determined? Bergson would, I think, answer, Neither! For the old notion of freedom, on the one hand, and of determination, on the other, Bergson would substitute

the compromise conception of self-determination, a conception indeed well domesticated in modern psychology and philosophy, but given a fresh prestige through the sanction of our philosopher. No act is indeed free in the sense that it is completely uncoupled from the mental life of the man with whom it originates. Man can be free, however, in the sense that he can be self-determined, that his act can be determined by the nature of the self of which the act is the expression. If freedom is thus defined, there will evidently be degrees of freedom. Freedom will be complete only where the fundamental self (not the self of psychology) acts in its entirety, where the whole of consciousness is concerned in the act.

Most of us, of course, do not have the symmetry and wholeness of mind required for perfect freedom. An incompletely integrated mass of ideas, impulses and feelings, the mind tends always to act locally, so to speak; a single idea, as in hypnotic suggestion, tends to set up for itself and to usurp the place rightfully belonging to the self as a whole. Similarly, a hereditary vice, an eccentric impulse, or a habit will so dominate the rest of the personality as to make true freedom impossible. Thus, says Bergson in a splendid passage in *Time and Free Will*, "many live this kind of life, and die without having known true freedom. But sug-

gestion would become persuasion if the entire self assimilated it; passion, even sudden passion, would no longer bear the stamp of fatality if the whole history of the person were reflected in it, as in the indignation of Alceste; and the most authoritative education would not curtail any of our freedom if it only imparted to us ideas and feelings capable of impregnating the whole soul. It is the whole soul, in fact, which gives rise to the free decision: and the act will be so much the freer the more the dynamic series with which it is connected tends to be the fundamental self.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The summary of Bergson's doctrine of freedom which I have attempted in the above section does not, according to a criticism which I have received from Mr. Lovejoy, adequately represent Bergson's argument as set out in Chapter III of *Time and Free Will*. “That argument” (I quote Mr. Lovejoy's memorandum in full) “rests chiefly upon Bergson's conception of duration and of consciousness as memory. Every moment of duration is new. And since we carry all our past along with us, in pure memory, then at every fresh moment of my experience I am an unprecedented complex — I consist of all that I have been *plus* the new moment's increment of being. Therefore, my action at each moment is free in the sense that it is the unique expression of an unprecedented being's action — it cannot be assimilated to my past or reduced to any law that can be learned from any uniformities of my past action.” I am very glad to quote this criticism as it brings out clearly what I myself omitted to emphasise in the present context (although the matter is touched upon elsewhere in my discussion), namely the enormous scope of the self's history which is brought to bear upon the present act, implied in Berg-

son's doctrine of pure memory, or of the eternal durability of any experience. The critical point of Bergson's argument, however, still seems to me to be the contention that determinism is bound up with the mosaic representation of the mind of the older associationist psychology, according to which an act is merely the resultant of the interplay of "ideas" after the manner of the interaction of forces in mechanical physics. The act of the mind, however, is a true "schöpferische Synthese," an original or creative resultant, and is hence unpredictable. Indeed, unless this line of argument is followed, you yield the whole case to the determinist, as, according to him, too, the present is merely an issue of the past.



XIII  
RETROSPECT AND SUMMARY



### XIII

#### RETROSPECT AND SUMMARY

It will be well to summarise at this point the salient ideas of Bergson's philosophy, at least in so far as we have been able to outline them in the foregoing sketch.

The most prominent aspect of Bergson's system, the aspect which is of the utmost significance for many of the concrete problems of reality and of life, is his criticism of intellectual knowledge. Such knowledge does not give us reality as it is; it transmutes reality into a set of symbols which are useful for the guidance of action, but which have no metaphysical significance.

If philosophy is to become a true metaphysic, it must relinquish the method of analysis for that of intuition. The mind must place itself into a living relation with its object; it must, for the time, become the object through the exercise of intellectual sympathy. Thus alone will it be enabled to follow the creative movement through its inner mazes and sinuosities, and to grasp it in its living wholeness, instead

of seeing it as so many things or states, which are only the intellect's stationary views of becoming.

The method of intuition, as might have been anticipated, will yield very different results from those of scientific intellection. In psychology it will reveal the soul to be the indivisible flux of our inner life as we actually live it, instead of a collection of discrete states, or the abstract unity of these states. Both the states and the unity are static concepts which have been scissored out of the concrete flow of the inner life, and have no metaphysical significance whatever. Similarly, in the world of matter, our practical interests break up the continuum of the material universe into an aggregate of atoms, bodies, classes, etc., together with their shifting relations; the true reality of things, their unceasing mobility, it treats as adventitious; motion is viewed as a function of rest, etc. Here, too, we must proceed by intuition. The mind must take up its stand within the stream of becoming. It must live reality instead of analysing it.

How this is possible we found it rather difficult to make clear. The process of intuition seems here to involve an ascription to nature of a life like our own, thus establishing an inner affinity between the mind and its object, between man and nature. The Leibnizian no-

tion of the fundamental resemblance between the structure and life of all items of reality, of the flower and the wall, of man and God, seems to be in mind here. The philosopher must cease to be analyst and become artist. His activity must become sympathetic and appreciative, rather than analytical and descriptive.

The abandonment of the atomic idea of the universe, a fabrication of the scientific intellect, and the substitution therefor of the notion of the universe as a living unity will necessitate a radical revision of many philosophical doctrines whose character was determined throughout by the scientific conceptions upon which they were based.

Evolution does not consist in an eternal redistribution of self-identical elements, as an obsolescent system of cosmical mechanics presented it, but is a genuine growth. Nor is evolution fully explained by the critical and destructive action of the environment, as represented by an equally inadequate biology. The most profound aspect of nature is not its tendency to cut off and destroy, but to elaborate and produce. Furthermore, evolution is not a mere re-shifting, with nothing added and nothing taken away. It is a genuine creation. It proceeds by true increments, unceasingly elaborating unprecedented novelties and fresh features of reality as it proceeds.

In the second place, if we relinquish the method of abstract analysis for that of intuition, we shall cease to regard the universe as a mechanism which grinds out results blindly through the operation of those mythical powers called laws of nature. A mechanism implies the conception of nature as an aggregate of static entities whose relation to one another is external rather than organic — a framework which bears unmistakable evidence of the transforming activity of the scientific intellect. The telic character of the universe is beyond question, though the purposes in nature are not so clearly anticipated nor so consistently striven for as the older theories of design often suggested.

Finally, if we reject the mosaic view of consciousness presented to us by associationist psychology, as we must reject it, then we must cease to think of human action as being determined by forces which are somehow alien to it. The will is free in the only significant sense of freedom. It is of course not a faculty by itself, uncoupled from the rest of the mental life, nor need it be in order for true freedom to be realised. True freedom exists when the act is the expression of the self in its entirety. Such freedom is of course in the beginning merely ideal, but it is realised more and more completely as the self achieves unity of life with the progress of spiritual culture.

#### XIV

### CRITICISM OF BERGSON: THE DOC- TRINE OF PURE CHANGE





## XIV

### CRITICISM OF BERGSON: THE DOCTRINE OF PURE CHANGE

It would carry us quite beyond the limits of our task to undertake a criticism of Bergson's philosophy in detail, or to examine exhaustively any one of his ideas. Let us single out, therefore, the two doctrines which are unquestionably the most fundamental and striking in his system, the doctrine of the static concept, and the doctrine of pure change. Take the last first.

Bergson represents reality as a process of pure change. It is doubtful, however, whether the idea of pure change is one which we can make very intelligible to ourselves. That the notion is a difficult one the whole history of philosophy proves. The idea of reality as something partially or wholly permanent, as somehow substantial, pervades the entire history of philosophical speculation from the earliest Greek physicists down. In the first philosophers of Greece whose names and teachings have been preserved to history we already meet

the attempt to explain the variety presented by the physical universe as somehow due to the mutation of some single element or substance, water, air, fire, and the like. Empedocles, Democritus and his followers, the so-called Greek atomists, explained change as consisting in the altered combinations and re-grouping of primitively simple elements. Plato contrasted the world of appearance with the world of eternal forms or ideas, each mundane appearance being but a sort of shadow or imperfect copy of its divine original. And Aristotle, so modern in many of his phases, finds unity and self-identity in the plan or function revealed in the details of structure and activity which a thing manifests. And so philosophers and theologians of the middle ages with their creation and emanation theories, the modern philosophers with their distinction between substance and attributes, the soul and its states, the thing-in-itself and phenomena, reality and appearance, the permanent possibilities of sensations and the sensations themselves, matter and its properties, the absolute and its finite manifestations, all alike bear witness to the insistent tendency to posit behind the fleeting appearance and show of the world a background of unalterable essence. Is this persistent tendency justified, or is it possible to conceive of nature as a process of absolute change without

any background of permanence at all as Bergson invites us to do?

Natur hat weder Kern noch Schale;  
Alles ist sie mit einem Male!

The thesis which I should like here to suggest and support is that the notions of permanence and change are entirely correlative in their significance and implications, and that the movements of nature always show difference within an underlying identity, and that pure change, strictly taken, is entirely inconceivable.

Take even so inherently and incessantly mutable a thing as the stream of our consciousness. In spite of the fact that the changes going on within my consciousness are incessant and inevitable, I am still able to say that it is my consciousness which is undergoing change, that it is I who am experiencing the various mutations which my inner life suffers. Indeed, as Professor Taylor remarks, it is just "because the self which changes with the flux of time and circumstances is still in some measure the same old self that we feel its changes to be so replete with matter for exultation and despair."

It would, in fact, be an embarrassing question to ask a follower of Bergson whether, and by what means, pure change would be recognised as change. The movement of a body, for ex-

ample, can be recognised only if viewed on a background of stationary objects, or by reference to a fixed point from which or towards which the movement is taking place. "A mere succession," as Professor Taylor says, "of entirely disconnected contents held together by no common permanent nature persisting in spite of the transition would not be change at all. If I simply have before me first A and then B, A and B being absolutely devoid of any point of community, there is no sense in saying that I have apprehended a process of change." And so with any instance of change whatsoever. In order for it to be known as change it must be viewed on the background of something which remains identical throughout the successive stages or phases of the change.

In what, precisely, the underlying identity in a given case of change consists it is at first difficult enough to say. This is particularly true of the fluctuations of our inner psychical life which are so rapid and radical as to have led many to abandon the whole idea of the mind's unity, and to interpret it as a mere aggregate of changing nuances or phases. Hence the general "Entseelung" of German philosophical speculation and the "soulless" psychology about which in England and America there has been so much noise. The problem is, however, not a hopeless one, and much has already been

done to bring us within sight of a fairly satisfactory solution of it. Let us merely indicate one or two of the principal points.

The identity within the change has been held to consist either in the form of elements which remain sensibly constant in the midst of their changing concomitants, or in the shape of an interest or purpose which remains identical throughout the process of change. The various events constituting the change are but so many steps or stages in the realisation of an underlying interest or purpose. The former system might be said to possess structural or qualitative unity, the latter teleological unity, a unity of persistent interest or purpose.

The self appears to have both these kinds of unity within it. In the first place, many of the contents of the mental life recur—we can “mean” the same objects by successive thoughts, that is, we have memory. Identically the same thought does not, indeed, recur; but, on the other hand, the thought, if it really concerns or intends the same object, cannot be wholly different. The other kind of unity which thought and the whole inner life possesses is the teleological unity referred to above, the unity imparted to it by the purposes, ends or interests which the mental life appears to be striving to fulfil. The selective activity of

attention along the mind's current interests, and the processes of topical or purposively controlled thought, are typical examples of the telic unity of the inner life referred to.

There is reason to believe that both these kinds of unity are eventually reducible to a single type, the type of functional unity, the unity of a fundamental principle or law according to which the successive stages of the change give way to each other. But the matter is perhaps too technical to go into very fully here.

It is safe to say, in any case, that any process of change will be found, when closely examined, to contain some perduring principle of unity or self-identity. The only cases in which change is indiscernible are (1) where nothing changes, and (2) where everything changes. Indeed, if Bergson's view of reality as pure change were true, we should never know it to be true. For the "change" would not be recognisable as change. We should at most have a succession of unrelated particulars which would affect us merely as so many separate impressions or shocks, as it were, but which we should be unable to bind together on the basis of any pervasive similarity, or of any underlying principle or law.

So far, therefore, from science and intelligence "drawing the dynamic unity out of nature as you draw the thread out of a string of

beads," it is rather true that experience would fall to pieces, that reality and change itself would crumble under our hands, if it were not for the unities within experience, those repetitive and relational features which the intellect discerns and holds fast throughout the successive mutations which so deeply affect it. Our criticism may be summed up in one word: If there is to be change, there must be things to change.

That something shall persist through the successive mutations which reality undergoes seems indeed to be absolutely demanded by other parts of Bergson's system. That change is never so radical as to involve the complete destruction of its object is, strange to say, one of the most characteristic ideas of this advocate of universal flux. The doctrine of universal mutation appears, in fact, as only one side of a profound (and one fears unpremeditated) paradox which lies deeply imbedded in the Bergsonian philosophy. Side by side with the doctrine of universal mutation we have, what seems to be the precise opposite of it, the notion, namely, of universal conservation. The universe is not merely a "conservative system" in the sense of a mechanistic cosmology founded upon the principle of the conservation of energy, a system which knows neither diminution nor gain; it is actually creative, a continual becoming or

achievement, in which nothing is ever abandoned and nothing lost. According to the definition of consciousness as memory, for example, present experience sums up in itself, drags behind it, as it were, the whole of the self's history. It is upon this idea, indeed, that a number of Bergson's best-known doctrines, both in the philosophy of nature and in the philosophy of mind, such as the doctrines of creative evolution, of indeterminate teleology and of the freedom of the will, are based. The subjugation of this and other internal difficulties of Bergson's system seems still to belong to the future.



XV

CRITICISM OF BERGSON: THE DOC-  
TRINE OF THE STATIC CONCEPT



## XV

### CRITICISM OF BERGSON: THE DOCTRINE OF THE STATIC CONCEPT

THE second fundamental doctrine underlying Bergson's polemic against the scientific intellect is the doctrine of the stationary concept.

Reality, Bergson has argued, is incessantly wearing and changing, but the concepts by which the intellect seeks to represent reality are static structures, unaffected by the flight of change and time. Hence Bergson's insistence on the inadequacy of scientific knowledge to give us insight into the true nature of what is real. We were concerned in the last section to throw doubt upon the validity of Bergson's first assertion, the assertion that nature is pure change. It is the object of the present section to suggest that his other main doctrine, the doctrine of the stationary concept, is at least equally doubtful.

The doctrine of the static concept was advocated by no less a psychologist than James, although it would not be difficult to cite passages from his works which are entirely irreconcilable with the idea. "Each conception," he wrote in the *Principles of Psychology*, "eternally re-

mains what it is, and never can become another. . . . Thus, amid the flux of opinions and physical things, the world of conceptions, or things intended to be thought about, stands stiff and immutable, like Plato's Realm of Ideas." And again, in his *Some Problems of Philosophy*: "Particular facts decay and our conceptions of them vary. A concept never varies; and between such unvarying terms the relations must be constant and express eternal verities." If this view is a true one, then, of course, concepts cannot represent the living movements of nature. To understand life by concepts would indeed be, as James and Bergson maintain, "to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits as if with scissors, and immobilising these in our logical herbarium where, comparing them as dried specimens, we can ascertain which of them statically includes or excludes which other."

Well, that words change their meanings, and that the concepts of science and of daily life are constantly being overhauled and revised is one of the most familiar of facts. The classes, species, laws, hypotheses, systems, in fact, the whole framework of science, undergo constant modification as discrepancies between the observed facts of nature and the conceptual constructions of science make themselves felt. Indeed, the Platonic doctrine of the independence of concepts and their eternal stability strikes

one as nothing less than superstitious, and there are reasons to suppose that it has been pretty generally abandoned for a more conservative position. The reign of purely formal logic whose concepts and processes are entirely independent of the material of thought has been thoroughly broken, and its authority hopelessly discredited. But it is precisely against the Platonic theory of concepts, as it seems to me, and the scholastic exercise of manipulating concepts according to the formal rules of logic, that the polemic of Bergson and James is exclusively directed.

If concepts are truly immutable and eternal, it is clear that they are utterly unable to represent a world in which change is such a pervasive and deep-running characteristic. But what if concepts are corrigible and endlessly flexible and thus delicately adaptable to the realities to which they refer? Thoughts and meanings are not stiff and unchangeable: they are the most mobile, sensitive and yielding things we know.

Indeed, if there is any difference between sense knowledge and conceptual thought in this regard, it may be justly urged that it is sense experience which represents reality as immobile and discrete. Common sense, based upon naive sense experience, sees celestial bodies as stationary and independent of each other. Science

knows them to be in constant movement, and held together by energetic relations, the laws of gravity, so-called, which penetrate the uttermost reaches of the physical universe. It may indeed be urged that it is the work of scientific intelligence to remove the apparent heterogeneity, to overcome the discretions, which naive experience presents. This was in fact the fundamental thought of Kant, according to whom the "Durcheinander," the natural chaos of primordial sense experience, is ordered and organised through the synthetic activity of the understanding. "Die Verbindung eines Mannigfaltigen kann überhaupt niemals durch Sinne in uns kommen. . . . Alle Verbindung ist eine Verstandeshandlung." The same view is aptly stated by Professor Hibben who has the Bergsonian doctrine of the concept particularly in mind: "The charge is made against conceptual thinking that it cannot portray the continuous. On the contrary, it is the peculiar function of thought to represent the continuous. Our perceptual intelligence sees things in fragments: our conceptual thought integrates them into a continuous whole. I may not be able to see a process, but I can think it. . . . While conceptual thought possesses the analytical power of separating a given process into elemental parts, into discrete portions of space, or separate instants of time, it must not be overlooked that it functions also in a synthetic

capacity, by means of which the connecting lines of continuity are established so that the mind can hold together the elements in one undivided whole."

The pragmatic reference of a concept to its perceptual consequences, when we act upon it, in order to prove its validity, seems to be simply another proof of its vital connection with the perceptual order. Its "truth" will be shown in its leading. If it leads to perceptual consequences which it was expected to lead to, it is true; if it does not so lead, its validity lies shattered. Both in their origin and in their leading, therefore, the conceptual order is interrelated with the perceptual. Concepts, as James says, are originally distilled from parts of percepts; with them we return again into the flux in order to guide our reactions upon it.

A leading difficulty of the Bergsonian system is that the results of intuition are incommunicable. If the results of intuition are to be made available socially they must first be translated into the articulate forms of intelligence. Thus the dissolution of intuitive experience would seem to be necessary both for purposes of action and of communication. The results of dumb intuition, in other words, seem, on Bergson's showing, to have no other value than to satisfy the metaphysical interests and cravings of the individual knower. If true knowledge is indeed incommunicable in the nature of

things, then Bergson himself writes and reasons in vain. The most definitive refutation of Bergson's system would thus be given by Bergson himself in four volumes!

These strictures must not, however, cause us to overlook or to underestimate the great services of Bergson to the cause of philosophy. It is always the tendency of a conceptual system to become detached from the perceptual order in which it originates, and in which alone it finds its justification. Furthermore, it is immediate experience to which we must go for our "acquaintance with" anything whatsoever. Words by themselves have no meaning. Their meanings are validated wholly by the realities to which they refer. They are by themselves mere symbols, and what they symbolise will of course be forever hidden from any one into whose experience the realities for which they stand have not entered immediately and first-hand. Against the worship of words and of concepts as metaphysical realities independent of the world of immediate experience, and against the mental manipulation of concepts according to the rules of formal logic, a favourite exercise of scholastic intellectualism, Bergson's system will forever stand as a wholesome and timely corrective.

A purely negative polemic is the most useless of pursuits. I propose, therefore, (1) the substitution for Bergson's notion of pure



change of the notion of change within an underlying identity, of identity realised through difference; (2) for the notion of the static concept and the Platonic world of intemporal ideas I propose the notion of the adjustable or corrigible concept, a conceptual order subject to constant modification and reorganisation, so as to fit the undeniably mutable world of reality which it symbolises; finally (3) for Bergson's intuition, which is often taken, properly or improperly, as an equivalent of inarticulate feeling, I propose Royce's recent term "insight," meaning by insight "the experience of wholes rather than fragments," "the coherent view of many facts in some sort of unity."

The organ of such insight is reason. A fundamental error of Bergson's is that he views reason as synonymous with mere analysis, thus contrasting it with intuition, a non-analytical appreciation of the homogeneous flow which reality presents. But analysis is only a preparatory step in reasoning. Nor does the reasoner, if he knows his business, deny the essential unity of that which he may, for purposes of better understanding or of practical control, divide and analyse. If Bergson uses the term intuition as something more than the bare awareness of fact, as he often seems to do, the term may turn out to be the essential equivalent of the term reason or insight itself. For reason or insight, too, sees reality in its wholeness, and that

is why the scientist and the philosopher know the world as it is more truly and adequately than does the man in the street.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that analysis and intuition exist on every plane of cognitive apprehension. The man in the street does not refrain from analysis, only the analysis here is motivated by very immediate and practical ends. Intuition, on the other hand, is exercised on the highest planes of the rational intelligence, if we mean by intuition an insight into the true wholeness of things. Reason is synopsis, and the synoptic grasp will be the more adequate and penetrating the more analysis has done her perfect work. Reasonable experience, as Royce insists, can of course not dispense with "instinct, feeling, faith and the inarticulate intuitions. These are the basis upon which the genuine work of reason, the wider view of life, must be carried toward its fulfillment. For whoever is to comprehend the unities of life must first live."

<sup>1</sup> Immediacy or concreteness of experience "may be due, as in the case of mere uninterpreted sensation, to the absence of reflective analysis of the given into its constituent aspects or elements. But it may also be due . . . to the fusion at a higher level into a single directly apprehended whole of results originally won by the process of abstraction and reflection. There is an immediacy of experience which is below mediate reflective knowledge, but there is also a higher immediacy which is above it." Taylor, *Elements of Metaphysics*, p. 32.

XVI

BERGSON AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
RELIGION — THE VALUE OF LIFE



## XVI

### BERGSON AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION — THE VALUE OF LIFE

A QUESTION of deep interest to many persons is that of the bearing of any new or original system of philosophy like Bergson's upon current religious interests and ideas. A few words upon this point, therefore, at the end of our considerations, may not come amiss.

It is very clear that if we are to consider this question at all intelligently or profitably we must first come to some sort of understanding as to just what we shall mean by religion. It is obvious, for example, that the question of the bearing of Bergson's teachings upon religion would have to be answered very differently in case we should identify religion with the dogmas of traditional theology, and in case we should take a freer view of its nature and meaning. The effect of Bergson's philosophy upon the traditional dogmas of theology might be almost wholly negative (unless, indeed, these dogmas were interpreted very freely and symbolically), while it might strongly corroborate and

support a religion defined more generously and vitally.

The view of religion which we shall adopt for the present purpose is that it is based upon the belief in the permanence of goodness, upon the belief that the universe is so constituted as ever to prefer the good and to destroy the evil. Defined very shortly, we might say (using words of Secrétan) that religion is the belief that perfection is eternal, or, in words of my own (of which I am fond, in spite of their anthropomorphic associations), it is the belief in love.

Whether such a belief is possible for us is a question, it seems plain, which can be settled partly upon the basis of factual or empirical evidence, in spite of the suggestion of James and others that the question, if it is to be settled favourably to religion, must be removed out of the realm of factual demonstration to the realm of faith and practical endeavour. James' wholesale condemnation of the empirical order as morally ambiguous or even bad seems to me, indeed, somewhat overwrought and harsh. "Every phenomenon that we would praise there," he writes, "exists cheek by jowl with some contrary phenomenon that cancels all its religious effect upon the mind. Beauty and hideousness, love and cruelty, life and death keep house together in indissoluble partnership; and

gradually there steals over us, instead of the old warm notion of a man-loving deity, that of an awful power that neither hates nor loves, but rolls all things together meaninglessly to a common doom." I do not wish here to enter upon the question of the comparative amounts of good and evil in the world, the question of optimism and pessimism, viewed from a merely historical or descriptive point of view. I have presented the case for religion, *i. e.*, for the belief in the preponderance of good, somewhat fully in my recent book, *The Problem of Religion*, where the reader will find my opinions and arguments, if he should care for them. It is of course clear, and it may be granted without further discussion, that the belief in the present preponderance or the eventual triumph of good, while capable of much empirical support, is in the nature of the case not susceptible of complete empirical confirmation, which must forever remain a philosophical aspiration rather than a definite achievement.

It is clear, however, and may readily be conceded, that the question of primary importance for religion is not whether the good is actually realised, but whether it is realisable in a world like this; whether the progressive victory of good over evil, of reasonableness and aspiration over unreasonableness and fate and chance, is

something for which, in the actual constitution of the world, we may fairly hope for and work for.

Moreover, and particularly, no moral evaluation of the universe can be regarded as at all adequate which leaves out of account man's active nature, which reckons up the chances of good and ill from the consideration of the physical forces, merely, which the world represents, leaving out of account the efficacy of human aspiration, the active energy of human agents. James was right when he asserted that for any philosophy to succeed it must avoid two fundamental defects: it must not in its ultimate principle baffle and disappoint our most cherished powers, and, second, it must not define the world in such a way as to give our active powers no object whatever to press against. The two kinds of existence, in other words, which would be unendurable are that in which all problems are hopeless and all striving therefore vain, and that in which all problems are already solved. The real foe of religion, or of any hopeful interpretation of reality, is therefore not naturalism, as is so often asserted, but absolutism in every form, whether absolutism be of the naturalistic and mechanical type contemplated by physical science, or of the logical or teleological type of absolute idealism. Both systems leave man out of account; both deny



what he feels to be the most inviolable part of his nature, his activity in the pursuit of his ends, the freedom and efficacy of his own life. If the question is asked, then, what, in a word, the constitution of the world would be which the moral nature of man can approve, in which trust and aspiration are appropriate moods, rather than fear and despair, the answer would be that it must be a world in which human ends can be truly achieved, though not without effort, struggle and perhaps much pain.

We are now fairly in position to estimate the bearing of Bergson's system upon any world-view which can be called religious. The three salient doctrines of Bergson's which have relevancy in the present connection are the doctrines of creative evolution, of indeterminate teleology, and of human freedom. They will be seen, when they are examined from our present point of view, to be broadly in keeping with a view of the world upon which, as we have held, religion depends. A few words upon each point will perhaps make the matter clear.

(1) The view of evolution as creative provides for novelty in the world, and for the appearance of features, therefore, which, though not actually existent, are ideally demanded. It denies mechanistic naturalism which views nature as a closed system whose changes are due, not to the efficacy of ideals and intelligent en-

deavour, but to the shifting and reshifting of forces in accordance with mechanical forces working blindly. Evolution, according to Bergson, is not a mere rethreshing of old straw, an eternal redistribution of matter and energy. Evolution, rather, is elaboration, production, a process in which fresh items of reality spring constantly into existence. The theological doctrine of creation is not only unassailable, it expresses the most central truth about the world which it is possible to utter. Traditional theology errs only in treating the act of creation as singular and final, and in referring it back to some mythical point in the past. Creation is not confined to the past: it is taking place continually.

That science should not recognise the creative and spontaneous aspects of evolution, but should interpret it in purely mechanical terms, is entirely natural in view of the object which science has set for itself. If there is genuine spontaneity in the world, science, whose ideal is calculation and prediction, must ignore it, just as psychology must ignore free will, if such a thing indeed exists. We are here merely restating, from a somewhat different point of view, the central point of Bergson's whole criticism of science, a criticism which will doubtless stand the test of utmost scrutiny. The only true science, according to Bergson, would be

history, the science which deals with the concrete and the individual, rather than the abstract and conceptual. The unique and the individual, just because it is unique and individual, forever eludes the notional grasp.

(2) But if Bergson's system is unfriendly to absolute creation theories, it is equally unfriendly to all forms of absolute teleology. If there is no absolute creation, in the sense of traditional theology, there is also no absolute predestination. The course of evolution is not mapped out, as it were, beforehand, so that no one, not even God, "can see the end from the beginning." The life of God himself lies before him largely in the form of an unrealised possibility, like the life of the youth whose vast and ill-defined aspirations and impulses are symptomatic of certain energies and tendencies, without, however, affording any clear hint or sign of the final outcome of the great adventure of life which he confronts.

Prophecy is therefore not so much a form of prognostication as a form of poetry. Its message is not primarily oracular, but normative and hortative. Its fictive utterances stir the imagination and the will, and thus bring events about through the release of human energies, rather than foretell, merely, a consummation which nature, left to herself, would have achieved.

(3) The whole of Bergson's philosophy, like the whole philosophy of religion, is thus seen to centre in freedom. The universe is a product of free creation simply because it is not force or mechanism, but freedom and life. The operation of freedom we witness first-hand in man, where the will liberates itself from the rule of matter and shapes life in conformity with its own ends and goals.

That such freedom is not unlimited and does not operate capriciously and in independence of the order of nature is a point which cannot be emphasised too strongly. The charwomen, in Sir Oliver Lodge's illustration, who break into the scientist's laboratory and disturb his scientific results, upset no laws of nature in doing so. They disturb the results merely by disarranging the conditions which the scientist has carefully prepared. I can, by merely pressing a lever, switch a locomotive from one track to another, according to my will. I can even derail it entirely by placing an obstacle upon the track. But what I cannot do is to keep it from moving along the lines of least resistance. Thus, while I can side-track the engine, or even upset it, I cannot deviate or upset the laws of nature. It is of course clear on a very little thought that the only condition on which I can carry out the purposes of my will is by the use of agents, by relying upon the uniformity of

nature without which all ends would become un-  
realisable, all purposes unfulfilled, and life it-  
self become a sheer impossibility. Indeed, the  
more one reflects on the matter the clearer it  
becomes that the constancy of nature is the one  
most important argument for theism which can  
be produced. That the ground is firm under  
our feet, that water slakes and fire burns, that  
bodies gravitate, that the sun rises and sets and  
the seasons recur — that nature, in short, is  
without shadow or turning — this is the one  
condition on which life can be good.

It is of the utmost importance to emphasise  
this point here because religion has often been  
thought to depend for its “proof” upon the  
interruption of the order of nature, upon mira-  
cles. The doctrine of miracles has often, even  
quite recently, been asserted to stand or fall  
with the doctrine of free will. Nature, it is  
asserted, cannot be a closed system of physical  
forces operating according to uniform laws,  
and the will be at the same time free. Either  
nature is not a closed system or free will is a  
miracle. “You cannot consistently hold,” one  
writer says, “that psychical miracles are possi-  
ble and hold that physical miracles are impossi-  
ble.” Well, one would likely not gain much  
reputation for logic and still less for common  
sense if one were to argue that he could by an  
act of volition raise his arm, and that therefore

he could by an act of volition raise the dead. But this is precisely what the argument above would come to. Perhaps the best way to deal with a logician of this type would be to invite him to test the quality of his logic by actually trying his power in the two directions. He might thus learn once for all the truth of Emerson's great teaching: "There is no chance or anarchy in the universe; all is law and gradation."

It is a fact frequently observed that gains in this world are seldom made without corresponding risks and losses, and, particularly, that the truth can never be taught without danger of misconception and misinterpretation. A brilliant instance of the latter fact was the late William James who suggested that the scientific-academic mind shows an extraordinary slowness in acknowledging "facts to exist which present themselves as wild facts, with no stall or pigeon hole," and was forthwith hailed as leader by every form of mysticism and occultism. The magazines of faith (never very inactive) were lighted in numberless breasts of men and women, and the floodgates were thrown wide for "spiritualists," faith healers, telepathists and mystery mongers of every class and name. Bergson is at the present time in danger of suffering the same evil fate. Doctrinaires as widely apart as syndicalists, socialists and an-

archists have claimed him for their leader. The forces (always with us in disquieting numbers) arrayed against the existing social order seem to have derived a peculiar comfort from the Bergsonian writings. The whole tendency is vividly reminiscent of the Rousseauan "back to nature" movement of the eighteenth century. Nature is distinctionless, streaming; the differentiation and organisation which it shows are a mere human artifice, and hence imperfect. God made the country and man made the town; whence it follows that existent society is an evil which ought to be resisted. Of such and similar unprofitable aberrations the newspapers and magazines are now full.

From the other side comes traditional theology and finds in Bergson's doctrines the warrant for a whole array of doctrines which, to say the least, should not be drawn from the position of obscurity to which the progress of time has assigned them without being subjected to very complete revision, "miracles" (I quote from an influential religious newspaper) "the fall, sin, revelation, redemption." These ancient doctrines doubtless have profound significance if it can be freed from the accumulation of theological verbiage which weights it down and hides it from view. If Bergsonism will give us a truly modern theology it will confer a great intellectual and spiritual benefit; but a new the-

ology which shall be really abreast with modern knowledge and sentiment can be gained only, I am persuaded, by going forward, not backward, to the old conceptions and distinctions.

What is one man's meat is another's poison. Doubtless, what scientists need is to be reminded of the limitation of mere analysis and abstract intellection, and to practise intuition and insight. What occultists and dreamers need is "that the northwest wind of science should get into them and blow their sickliness and barbarism away." And what all good men and women need is to be freed from misgivings and fear, and to be fortified in their better resolutions, so as to fit them for the highest task of which a man is capable, the task, namely, of sustaining and furthering the interests of right and of truth, and of making the gift of life one which shall be increasingly desirable to those who have been destined to share in it. To these ends, we may feel sure, no one would be more anxious to contribute than Bergson himself.



XVII

BERGSON AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
RELIGION — THE PROBLEM  
OF DEATH



## XVII

### BERGSON AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION — THE PROBLEM OF DEATH

THE central problem of philosophy, and particularly of the philosophy of religion, whose main interest it is to appraise the meaning of reality when regarded in relation to human interests and aspirations, has often been said to be the problem of death. Plato, indeed, defined philosophy as a meditation on death, and the problem of death has remained, along with that of God and of freedom, one of the standard problems of which philosophy, according to a tacit but wide-spread demand, must give some accounting. Nor is formal philosophy alone occupied with this problem: for death is so sensational and universal a phenomenon, and it so often comes as the violent interrupter of our work and our hopes, that it forces itself upon the attention of even the most heedless and stoical, and thus becomes one of the principal topics of popular reflection and surmise, as the most signal illustration of that cruelty of impermanence which pervades nature

throughout. "*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*"

Now it would be natural to suppose that a philosophy which raises the principle of life into a central principle of all reality and existence would have some clear word upon the vexed question of death and a future existence. Nevertheless, Bergson has singularly little to say upon the question, and the few passages which bear directly upon it are either so obviously rhetorical or else so cautious and tentative in their tone as to leave the reader entirely in doubt as to what Bergson's views of the existence and the significance of death really are. It is not very difficult, however, although it has, I believe, not often been done, to trace out the implications of Bergson's expressed metaphysical doctrines with a view to seeing what this "metaphysician of the life force" has to teach us concerning the final destiny of life—that principle about the nature and activities of which he has more to say than about any other one thing.

The question of future life is a very ambiguous one, and we cannot hope to deal very successfully with the bearing of Bergson's philosophy on the question until this ambiguity is somewhat cleared up by making a few very elementary distinctions. It plainly contains a number of distinguishable questions which admit

of being treated separately. Only two of these need concern us here.

A distinction must be made, in the first place, between the survival of life in some form or other, and the survival of the specified or individuated forms of life which we call individuals or persons, in other words, between the survival of life as such, and individual immortality. Second, we must distinguish between the temporary survival of life (either general or individual) and the eternity of life, or immortality in the strict sense of the word. It is easy to see that the two kinds of survival are very different, and that either one is an antecedent possibility.<sup>1</sup> The various possibilities, then, to enumerate them in full, are (1) that life in some form will temporarily survive the death of any living individual; (2) that life in some form is eternal; (3) that the individual is destroyed at death; (4) that the individual survives death for a time; (5) that the individual is immortal. The divisions are of course not mutually exclusive, the latter ones involving

<sup>1</sup> It is the failure to seize these simple distinctions which renders much of the recent literature on the implications of Bergson's philosophy for the problems of religion and of life so utterly valueless. Cf., for example, the article, *Some Implications of Bergson's Philosophy*, in the North American Review for March, 1914. There are doubtless other pieces which are still more sleazy and uncritical than this one, but I have not read them.

the former. The character of Bergson's system makes it especially important to keep these distinctions clearly in mind; for while even the eternal survival of life in some form may be asserted with considerable assurance, the survival of the individual would seem to be highly problematic, something, in any case, the possibility of which would have to be ascertained by a number of special considerations which have perhaps not been fully worked out even by Bergson himself. And the matter is doubtless of first-rate importance for the question which according to McTaggart is the fundamental question of any philosophy of religion: Is the world good on the whole? The mortality of the individual, for example, might be quite consistent with the goodness of the universe on the whole, if only other lives survive, and human ideals, in James' fine phrase, come elsewhere to fruition. This seems to have been in the mind of Marcus Aurelius when he reminds us that no matter how long a man might live, he could lose no other life than his own. The universe, that is, would still contain other lives, and that is enough.

The eternity of life in some form seems to follow directly from the somewhat dazzling Bergsonian doctrine that the sole reality is "immediacy," that reality, that is, is to be found in the very texture of immediate experi-

ence itself, considered as independent of a so-called world of "objects." If the world is a feeling it must be felt to exist. "Esse est percipi." So long as anything at all exists, so long consciousness, and hence life, must exist too. The battle of life would thus seem to be won without much resistance, life's enemy having itself no true existence and hence no power to harm.

As a God self-slain on his own strange altar,  
Death lies dead;

so that the determined charge of life upon its ancient enemy matter as pictured in the rather grotesque flight of rhetoric at the end of the third chapter of *Creative Evolution* would seem to be little more than a gratuitous display of military effort, calculated to impress the populace.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided movement of descent which is materiality itself, so all organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death."

Still, the references in this oft-quoted passage to the "undivided movement of descent which is materiality itself," and to the contrary impulsion of life, "the inverse of the movement of matter," are full of ominous significance, reminding us, as they do, of another Bergsonian doctrine, the doctrine of the equal existence of two principles, life and matter, which seems to be a complete retraction of the monistic idealism which asserted consciousness to be the sole reality. This dualistic aspect of Bergson's system is indeed one of its most striking and characteristic features, and we have had occasion to refer to it more than once in our previous discussions. A large part of the popularity of Bergson's system (the love of conflict is age-old and ineradicable in the human breast) is doubtless due to this dramatic competition, this endless "*Wechselspiel von Hemmen und von Streben*," between the two opposing principles of reality, life and its ancient enemy, matter, which the Bergsonian philosophy teaches. Life appears as the hero, matter as a sort of heavy villain in this universal and determined conflict. Life is ever becoming entangled, ever extricating itself; flanking, penetrating, retreating, again moving forward, life ever outwitting, with an infinitely wise art, its inert and intractable foe, brute necessity, in the shape of matter and mechanism.



Nevertheless, this dualism need perhaps not trouble us unduly, as it seems after all to be merely an aspect of the world's appearance, and not to represent it as it really is. The reader will remember (a memory, even if it is not an infallible Bergsonian memory, is at times a highly inconvenient thing) that matter is merely a fiction of the scientific intelligence, invented to facilitate action, and has, therefore, after all, no genuine existence. Besides, if matter (or the fiction of matter) is really instrumental to action it is difficult to see how it could be obstructive of action, an "inverse movement" which tends to render nugatory the efforts which life puts forth. As Mr. Santayana aptly remarks: "If matter were merely the periphery which life draws around itself, in order to be a definite life, matter could never abolish any life; as the ring of a circus or the sand of the arena can never abolish the show for which they have been prepared. Life would then be fed and defined by matter, as an artist is served by the matter he needs to carry on his art." In any case, if the fiction of matter were created by life merely to facilitate action, it could, one would suppose, be again withdrawn by life as soon as it proved to be really obstructive of the movement of life, instead of serving and furthering it.

The whole contrast between the two forces,

life and matter, is indeed only an illustration of Bergson's incurable addiction to dichotomy, and to the reification of concepts, the erection of them into entities or even powers which is, according to Bergson's standing criticism, one of the bosom vices of "intellectualism." Bergson's strong pictorial imagination, indeed, constantly leads him to the use of language which is often doubtless too crassly spatial for even the most confirmed of intellectualists. So life moves up and matter down, and the two endeavour to overcome and destroy each other. But, strictly speaking, there is no matter and no movement and no up nor down. Besides, in a reality with a universal memory the part "destroyed" would still persist to haunt its destroyer; nay, its inherent life and energy would become the very condition of that creativity which is of all nature's traits the most interesting and significant. Universal animism and the ceaseless antagonism of life and matter; radical becoming and eternal conservation; matter a fiction and matter a force; an uncompromising nominalism and an idealism as real and as influential as that of Plato or Aristotle; the employment of sharp analysis and an incomparable finesse of dialectic to prove the futility of all analysis and the uselessness of all dialectic: these are only some of the internal

contradictions and paradoxes which (if intellectual consistency has not entirely ceased to be a virtue) would seem to require a somewhat more sustained effort of intuition, or else of some other form of mental operation, than they have so far received at the hands of their author.

The answer, then, to the question as to the ultimate survival of life would seem to depend largely upon the question as to what part of Bergson's system is taken as the more fundamental and characteristic, the spiritual monism implied in the identification of reality with experience, immediate or other, or the dualism of life and matter, with their unceasing conflict. If we decide, as I think we are bound to do, in favour of the former alternative, it is possible to view the dualism in Bergson's system as merely an accommodation to popular thought and to science, as a failure on the part of Bergson (always a somewhat pardonable one in a "new" philosopher) to abandon wholly the terminology of the modes of thought which he is criticising. It is well to remind ourselves, meanwhile, that, even if we adopt the less favourable dualistic interpretation, the chances of life's survival are only lessened, not forfeited. Although the issue of the conflict between life and mechanism may be doubtful and long delayed,

life may still throw the last stone, and eventually win its freedom from the tyranny of death and of fate.

When we pass to the question of the survival of individual forms of life, to the question of "individual immortality," our problem seems to become somewhat less difficult. There are two lines of argument which favour immortality, one positive, one negative. The first is in a sense a reiteration of the idealistic argument for the eternity of consciousness, namely, that only the immediate, that is, consciousness, is real. The second consists in a denial of the orthodox scientific doctrine of the dependence of consciousness upon some form of nervous organisation. Let us take them in their order.

(1) If we say that consciousness is the only reality, death, which is the absence of consciousness, cannot be real; its reality, at any rate, could never be verified. No one can witness his own death. And even if one could, one could surely never testify to his own death. Disembodied spirits (provided they existed and had the power of communication) could indeed bear testimony to the possibility of a future existence, but the contrary testimony would obviously be worthless. As Mr. Schiller remarks, while the ghost of Lord Lyttelton might admonish his friend that the latter's doubts in the future were unfounded, no ghost could re-

turn and possibly convince any one that future life was an illusion.

(2) The most serious scientific argument against immortality, the argument from the alleged dependence of consciousness upon the body, particularly the brain, is invalidated in advance by Bergson's views of the relation of consciousness to the brain, which have already been briefly indicated in a previous connection (Section XII). Consciousness or pure memory (as distinguished from habit) is a purely psychical mode of existence, and does not depend for its functioning upon the material dispositions of the brain. The brain does not secrete thought, as the liver secretes bile, to use an old illustration, or as heated water produces steam, it merely transmits it, as a glass window pane transmits light, or a metal rod transmits heat.

The transmission hypothesis is not contradicted, it may be worth while to remark in passing, by the argument from nervous pathology to the effect that brain disturbances produce disturbances in the course of consciousness. This is to be expected on the transmission theory as well as on the older materialistic hypothesis according to which the brain produces or creates consciousness. A window pane which is wrinkled or covered with dust cannot transmit light so well as one which is perfect

and free from dust. The pathological facts, then, prove nothing whatever against the independent existence of consciousness. To adapt somewhat an illustration of Mr. McTaggart's, it would be as hazardous to maintain that there would be no consciousness if there were no brain as it would be to insist that if a man walked out of his house he could not see daylight because there would no longer be any windows through which he could see it.

Still, let us suppose that consciousness, which exists otherwise in a vast ocean of consciousness, can come to the surface, as it were, only through media, like nervous substance, which it finds pervious to the particular kind of energy which it represents, just as heat or light cannot pass through matter by any path, but must take the path of readiest conductivity, whatever path it finds most pervious to it. Or let us adopt the analogous hypothesis, one already familiar to antiquity, but held to-day by William James and Bergson, that it is the bodily organisation which determines the individuality of each self. Evidently, on either one of these hypotheses the individualised form of consciousness which we mean by personality, and whose perpetuity we mean to assert in the doctrine of individual immortality, must disappear with the destruction of the body to which it owes its individual existence. The only pos-

sibility of securing individual immortality, in this case, would evidently be to secure the perpetuation of the organism to which the individualised form of consciousness is attached. But of the success of this aspiration men are only too well apprised. If by death we mean the destruction of the body, death's reality is probably for most men beyond the reach of metaphysical argument. To doubt death, in this sense, would be at least as difficult as it is for an ardent realist to doubt the existence of the chair in which he is sitting, a feat which, according to Mr. Russell, is possible only for those who have had a long training in philosophy! Not only is the organism destroyed by matter and mechanism, by those fatal forces which everywhere environ it, but life itself destroys other life, as the most casual observation of nature will show. "Nothing arises in nature," says Lucretius, "save helped by the death of some other thing." Each animal life lives at the sacrifice of other lives, until it shall itself fall victim to some stronger, hungrier or more malicious foe. And even if there were no "matter and mechanism" or other living beings to destroy the individual, life, as modern science tells us, at least in its more highly organised forms, represents such an unstable equilibrium that it tends to break down of itself as a sheer result of its imperfect organisation. Weis-

mann's claim that natural death is not a necessity for the lowest forms of life, namely protozoa, has been apparently corroborated by recent experiments upon paramœcium, which have shown that a single individual can perpetuate itself indefinitely by mere division, without conjugation, if environmental conditions are sufficiently favourable, if the culture medium, for example, is changed frequently and is kept free from bacteria. But organisms which have passed this low stage of evolution cannot hope for so much. "Groups of cells in our bodies," a recent scientist writes, "are highly specialised into certain organs, each dependent upon other organs for its existence. When one part gives out, other parts must suffer, until finally the entire system succumbs. The penalty of our highly developed organisation is death."

It appears, then, that so far from increasing our chances of life by attaining a higher and more complex organisation, our only chance of an indefinite individual survival is by paying the penalty (if this were possible) of degradation to the rank of unicellular creatures. But an immortality such as amœba are capable of would, I suppose, be hardly regarded as worth the having. The point is an interesting one, as it brings out very clearly something which is often overlooked, namely that men's desire



for immortality is based upon the tacit assumption that future life will be very happy, that it will be an improvement over the present life, or at least fully as desirable. But that it will be is something which can be rendered plausible only by a number of special considerations which are usually, I believe, not independently examined.

The regular way for life to perpetuate itself, even in paramœcium, is by conjugation and reproduction. Bergson's general theory of the sheaflike character of biological evolution seems to favour the view, too, that life perpetuates itself through a succession of individuals, and that the consciousness of the individual is only a ray, as it were, from an original unitary stream of consciousness which has split up in the forward movement of evolution. The original life impulse was a unitary affair which is shattered in its progress. The stream of life breaks, is sometimes turned aside, takes on fresh momentum, is arrested, wastes itself, is ever pushing forward and ever checked by the strange obduracy and stubbornness of its material obstacle. The "one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves" is in any case not the increasing harmony and unity of life and living beings, as if, after all, "all the living" did not "hold together" in order to overcome every resistance, "perhaps even death."

“Life, in proportion to its progress, is scattered in manifestations which undoubtedly owe to their common origin the fact that they are complementary to each other in certain respects, but which are none the less mutually incompatible and antagonistic. So the discord among species will go on increasing. . . . The philosopher who begins by laying down as a principle that each detail is connected with some general plan of the whole, goes from one disappointment to another as soon as he begins to examine the facts.” The unity which the diverging directions of life manifest is due to the faint traces which they still show of their common source. “The harmony,” to cite an oft-quoted passage, “lies behind, not before.”

Thus every day is a day of creation and a day of death. “The forms of life,” according to the poetic interpretation of Bergson by Mr. Burroughs, “are like the clouds in the summer sky, ever and never the same; the vital currents flow forever, and we rise to the surface like changing, iridescent bubbles that dance and play for a moment, and are succeeded by others, and ever others,” new souls ever arising and ceasing to be, or else passing from body to body, in an indefinite or possibly endless series of transmigrations.

The belief in the prolongation of the individual's identity beyond the event of death

tends to be further weakened when we consider the alterations, and the consequent loss of identity, which a self suffers even during its present history. In order to deal with the question as intelligibly as possible, let us first ask ourselves what is meant by the term individual or personal identity. We have already dealt with this question to some extent in connection with the problem of change (Section XIV). We there suggested that the unity or the identity of the self depends upon an interest or purpose which remains identical throughout the various mutations which the self suffers. The unity, we said, was a teleological unity like that of a drama or a game of skill, a unity imparted to the inner life by an underlying plan, aim or interest which this life is striving to realise or fulfil. Nothing is more evident, however, than that the organisation or integration of the inner life is always, at any given time, imperfect, to say nothing of the fluctuations in these interests and ideals incident to growth and maturation, and to the crises to which our inner life is always liable. Not only is there at any given time a more or less permanent stratification of the self into systems of different and more or less incompatible interests and aims, but the history of any life is little more than a succession of characteristic groups of aims and interests, each of which arises only

in order to dissolve and give way to its successor. It is no doubt true that the unity and continuity of the individual's inner life have frequently been overemphasised. Aside from the abnormal cases of more or less complete disturbance of memory functions, or the graver disturbances of alteration, duplication and multiplication of the self, we have the common experiences of defective memory, false memory, and the numerous changes in one's tastes, judgments, emotional attitudes, ambitions, ideals and the like, incident to personal development and decline. If our bodies undergo a complete change every seven years, as a popular mythology has it, our minds and characters sometimes, as in the phenomena of "conversion," and at times of great mental and emotional stress due to unexpected fortune or calamity, undergo a far more radical and complete change, and are always, as every theory of education must assume, capable of changes for the better. It may thus easily happen that two stages of a man's life resemble each other less than two parallel stages of different men's lives, so that "individual identity" would here be evidently little more than a name. "Turn thy thoughts," says the Roman Stoic, "to the consideration of thy life, thy life as a child, as a youth, thy manhood, thy old age, for in these also every change was a death. Is this any-

thing to fear? In like manner, then, neither are the termination and cessation and change of thy whole life a thing to be afraid of."

It is of course true that the different stages of the self's development are not cut off from each other by any clear lines of demarcation, something being always carried over from one stage of development to another. Even if the stream of consciousness proper continually renews itself, the results of past experience register themselves in the nervous system, past actions solidify into habits, habits form character. A man's past being known, we can diagnose his present and largely anticipate his future, as if his past after all projects itself into the present. Nero is a criminal even between his crimes, as his next act would prove. Memory, furthermore, does not entirely fail. The various changes which the self undergoes are never, except in the abnormal cases recorded by the psychical researchers, so radical and profound that the sense of personal identity is entirely lost. The tastes, judgments, emotional attitudes, ideals, for example, of our past history are still recognised as ours. We cannot exchange them with some one else's similar past experiences, no matter how much we may profit from such exchange, and might, accordingly, wish to make it.

It is therefore a possibility, provided we can

believe in the persistence of memory independently of a nervous organisation (without memory "future" life would not be a continuation of the present life, but a different life), that the self may survive the crisis of death, as it has survived many lesser ones. And I do not see how any one can disprove that it will.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever our conclusions on that may be, a man can, in any event, be certain of such immortality as is implied in the partial transmission of his traits to posterity, and in the preservation of his works and his influence. So long as the human race continues to exist, the effects of an individual life may continue to exist too, provided these effects are regarded as worthy of preservation. Science, inventions, art, letters, institutions, in short, civilisation — these are but the products and work of past lives which have been hoarded up and guarded

<sup>1</sup> There is one argument which it might be worth while to mention. It has often been urged (as, for example, by Mr. McTaggart) that the same considerations which go to prove the immortality of the soul also prove its pre-existence. But if a genuine continuance of life depends upon memory, then the soul has no pre-existence. For we do not remember any pre-existence. And if we have lived previous lives and have forgotten them, there is no reason to believe that we shall remember anything of the present life during a subsequent life. But this would not be immortality. Cf., for the whole subject, Chapters III and IV in Mr. McTaggart's *Some Dogmas of Religion*, a remarkably interesting and acute work which is entirely too little known.

against destruction, because they have proved their fitness to survive. And a comparatively small number of men may hope for a transitory existence beyond their death in the memories of other men, in the shape of posthumous fame. But this too will cease in a short time. Nothing indeed is so calculated to impress upon us the transitoriness of a life, even in the form of its impersonal products and effects, as the frequency with which men fail of being credited with their achievements, and the failure of those fragile hopes, gratitude and posthumous fame. When one sees even these perish before one's eyes, or become merged in the general mass, it becomes more difficult than ever to believe that a man's life can be a permanent element in a universe "in which nations and planets are but momentary shapes." "Of human life the time is a point, and the substance is in a flux, . . . and the soul is a whirl, and fortune hard to divine, and fame a thing devoid of judgment. And to say all in a word, everything which belongs to the body is a stream, and what belongs to the soul is a dream and vapour, and life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn, and after-fame is oblivion."

If we ask the question, finally, on what conditions the survival of the self, in so far as it does survive, will depend, the answer can be given only in general terms. The conditions

under which a living organism as we know it on earth survives is, as evolutionary science tells us, that its parts are so adjusted to each other as to function harmoniously in the service of the organism as a whole, and that the organism as a whole is adjusted to the conditions outside it upon which it depends. The self's survival, too, one may say in general, will likely depend upon the extent to which it has achieved unity of life through the consistent and orderly pursuit of some aim, interest or plan, and upon the degree to which this aim, interest or plan coincides with the fundamental purpose of the universe in which the self is to exist. In other words, its survival will depend upon the consistent and orderly pursuit of those objects and interests which are themselves most central and normative in the universe. The two conditions which seem requisite for immortality in any form, therefore, are a knowledge of the true structure and purpose of the universe in which our lot is cast, and an identification of our interests and aims with those elements in it which are most lasting and significant. In the noble symbolism of Scripture, we must lay up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. Immortality, it follows from this, may then be conditional and a matter of degree. Moreover, it is not something which is thrust



upon us whether we will or no. It is not, as the Germans say, a Gabe but an Aufgabe, not a gift but an achievement. As Professor Taylor finely says: "A future existence is not a heritage into which we are safe to step when the time comes, but a conquest to be won by the strenuous devotion of life to the acquisition of a rich, and at the same time orderly and harmonious, moral selfhood. And thus the belief in a future life, in so far as it acts in any given case as a spur to such strenuous living, might be itself a factor in bringing about its own fulfilment."

It is often asserted that unless immortality were true, life would lose its value. I cannot think this judgment just. If life has been valuable, its value is not diminished or destroyed by life's termination. Do we regard rare cloud effects as valueless because we know them to be evanescent? Or is it a loss that a flower should have blossomed even if its beauty does not survive the passing of spring?

Is it so small a thing  
 To have enjoyed the sun,  
 To have lived light in the spring,  
 To have loved, to have thought, to have done,  
 To have advanced true friends, and beat down  
     baffling foes?

Life is what it is, and the cessation of my life

does not render other lives valueless. Neither does it render the universe uninteresting or bad. And since life is not an unmixed good, death cannot be wholly evil. "For with death," as Mr. McTaggart says, "we leave behind us memory, and old age, and fatigue. And surely death acquires a new and deeper significance when we regard it no longer as a single and unexplained break in an unending life, but as part of the continually recurring rhythm of progress — as inevitable, as natural, and as benevolent as sleep. We have only left youth behind us, as at noon we have left the sunrise. They will both come back, and they do not grow old."

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